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BABEL





By the same author:

THE MASK
THE WALL



BABEL

John Cournos



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BOOK I

A MEDLEY

To Olivia Shakespear



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CHAPTER I: A MEDLEY

"And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech."
GENESIS, xi: 1.

GOMBAROV WAKES IN AN OLD WORLD

ONCE more Gombarov dreamt the old, ever recurring corridor dream, which had come to him at irregular intervals since childhood, always in a new variation.

There was no starting point, and he did not know how, when, and where he had gotten into a peculiar contrivance, which, if it resembled anything, resembled the device known as the "dumb-waiter." But he undoubtedly felt the terrifying sensation of going down, down, down, with incredible and ever increasing speed, until he reached the deep, nethermost cellar, at the very foundations of what must have been an immensely tall building. The whole house—for house it surely was—appeared alive with ancient memories and portents of the future. It was heaving with a restlessness as of gestating, shut-in thoughts trying to break their cells, and it groaned with inexplicable, strange noises, which aroused intense apprehension in the heart of the visitor who groped his way through a labyrinth of dimly-lit corridors and passed by innumerable closed doors, each seeming to hide an alluring, ugly mystery. Every instant he expected a door or doors to open, and a Thing or Things to pounce upon him. At his side there glided rather than walked



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a grey presence, a vague yet familiar human shape, as noiseless and intense as a shadow he had once known intimately and with hatred, and had forgotten. Fear possessed him, as it can possess only in dreams: there was about the place an atmosphere of something terrible impending which heavily oppressed him, while, with great effort, he continued his way through the unending maze of narrow, almost airless passages, holding in one hand a truncheon, in the other his familiar gold watch, which, oddly enough, had ceased exercising its customary function, but, even as he walked, gave out in a gramphonic voice a loud, screechy, disconcerting tune, a peculiarly modern, raucous medley made up of threads and snatches of songs he had heard sung at one time or another by white men blackened to resemble negroes, to the accompaniment of banjo-strumming and clog-hopping.

The dream time woke him. Terrified and perspiring, he peered over the edge of his bed-cover and wondered where he was. The room was alive with the slow movement of the particles of the early grey light, and Gombarov's half-open eyes strayed vaguely and reluctantly, with no volition of their own, but wholly responsive to the hypnotic persuasions of dawn. There was in them the bewilderment of an awakening from a trance, then a strained effort to identify his position. His glance, grown steady at last, fell on the engravings on the wall. These, however, were sufficiently cosmopolitan to reveal no clue to his whereabouts.

With diligent scrutiny he studied the large picture directly facing him on the dingy red wall. It was a familiar example of what, through his association with artists, he had learnt to know as a masterpiece of bad art, a favourite, needless to say, with that great public which, almost single-voiced, echoed the familiar sentiment, "I may not know good art, but I know

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what I like"; a sentiment which, if artistic wisecracks are to be believed, is peculiar to our age, a by-product of democratic institutions. The picture showed a wooded spot; in the foreground two modish females of the furbelow and bustle period stood facing one another; stripped to the waist, and poised in an attitude of duel combatants, they flourished long foils. The presence in the background of two equally modish seconds testified to the affair being properly serious, altogether *comme il faut*. The breasts of the facing figure seductively confronted the spectator; the other figure flaunted its hardly less alluring back; the fluffy things of both hung down from the waist, not unlike the skins of half-shorn lambs; in short, it was a production unerringly calculated to tickle the fancy of a susceptible bourgeois world, which surely knew its own mind. As the wakened sleeper's eyes strayed leftward, they encountered another picture, which answered the secret aspiration in human beings to view forbidden fruit: it showed a young naked girl standing ankle-deep in the sea, shivering a little, perhaps conveniently, to give her cause to stoop in a shy manner, her hands on her knees, thus achieving the effect of a virgin suddenly sighting a Peeping Tom and piquantly striving to hide what strange eyes should not see.

He had seen the same pictures—and furniture, for that matter—at the American hotels and at his own home in Philadelphia; so it was hardly astonishing that on waking, his first mood should have been one sharply conscious of his position nearly three months ago, when he was eking out a livelihood for himself and the large irresponsible family—largely of his stepfather's begetting—by selling himself, soul and entrails, to that popular organ of news and public opinion, the *New World*.



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"Blast it! It must be nearly time to go to work," he muttered, and thought he heard his mother's footsteps.

His eyes strayed to the inscriptions under the pictures: *L'Afrique d'Honneur* and *L'Aube de Septembre*. That was strange: the pictures at home were inscribed in English.

"What a funny mistake!" he laughed, as he grasped the true state of affairs: that he was no longer in Philadelphia, that he had not been there for nearly three months. He was in Paris, having come by the way of Naples, Rome, Florence, Venice, and Milan, now realised visions of beauty, which had once seemed impossible.

What strange things dreams were, thus to destroy all sense of time and space! He felt relieved at the thought that he need not go, could not go if he had desired, to his accustomed place at the *New World*, where he had misspent fifteen years, the best of his life. There was comfort for him in the thought of there being three thousand miles between himself and the place he had come to regard as his prison. Yet now, as often before, a panic, a kind of blind terror, seized him. Never before had he been away from home for so long. He had been too near a nervous breakdown to experience exultation at the prospect of facing infinite horizons, endlessly stretching vistas of a large world. Surely he had but lately left a prison, had been there too long to become quickly accustomed to the dazzling light of freedom. He still felt the clank of irons, the crushing weight of his chains; these were yet with him, no longer at his ankles, but in his heart. So heavily they sat there, that the joy and blitheness he had suspected of being there seemed not to be there; and his courage ebbing, he would wish himself, in such a mood, back at his treadmill, which, at all events, afforded him material security. Now, when once more this fear of life was upon him, he cursed himself for his rashness in leaving his

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fleshpots behind him, or contrariwise, for his faint-heartedness in turning from the Promised Land. Promised? Well, hardly; unless one could say that the land which Columbus set out to seek was promised. There was possibly some justification for Gombarov's colleagues at the *New World* thinking him a fool in leaving a comfortable position, good for life, and going off on a wild goose chase.

What did he want? What was his object, without his seeming to have an adventurous soul, to thus set out adventuring at his age, in wide, uncertain seas, with a mutinous crew of instincts ever urging him to turn back? What secret or mystic force in him, or outside, impelled him forward, as by repeated proddings, leaving him no choice but to obey? Precise knowledge was withheld from him; his tragic past seemed to be without reason, and he was vouchsafed no glimpse of the future. There were no horizons spreading before him as he proceeded on his journey; the walls of life merely appeared to recede a little, as the sea mists recede, or appear to recede, before ships advancing. He was without helm or rudder; a blind, unconscious will guided him: he did not know whether toward some blessed isle, where his tired body and soul might rest, or toward some malignant torrent, fiercely forcing a path through the cleft of some new Scylla and Charybdis. A faint hope shone in his heart; in his collected moments he knew that he was not so much running to a place as running away from one. Let worse come, so it be different! At other times he appeared to be running from himself, which would seem to be as foolish as a dog wildly turning to bite his own tail. But a dog does wildly turn sometimes to bite his own tail; and he, Gombarov, was running from himself. Himself? Well, not exactly. From what the world and circumstance had made him. He knew, this he really knew, that he was not what he appeared



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to be. He was a natural, life-loving, gay man; a true man of this earth, and loving the earth, and all that was made for man on the earth. He felt himself to be like the *Ancient Mariner* with the dead albatross hung around his neck. But some one, surely not he, had killed the albatross, and hung it round his neck. Why they had killed the albatross, and why he, innocent of its killing, should have been chosen to bear the ill-omened burden was quite beyond his knowledge.

His departure from the American city, where he had spent twenty years of his life, was the second sharp break in his life; the first had been when he had left his ten years of childhood behind in the Russian woods. But for this decision to cut loose from the City of Brotherly Love, a decision that saved the remnants of his manhood, he surely would have put a bullet in his head. That would appear to be a sufficient reason for his undertaking; after all, he had but one head, while the supply of bullets was in no danger of becoming exhausted. Bullets failing, there was always the Thames, famous for its lethal waters, which had consoled many, would console more. That was the point: he had nothing to lose, nothing whatsoever. There was plenty of time to jump from a bridge, or take a bullet or a pill. One knew so little of the two most widely advertised countries. Theological Baedekers, while pointing the ways—the one a straight, narrow path, the other a bee line, permitting, however, short, even very short, cuts—were yet strangely inadequate as to landmarks and particulars of life in either place: they laid peculiar stress on the respective climates, on which they dwelt with the eloquence and verisimilitude of eye witnesses, and emphasised the advantages of taking up one's permanent residence in a temperate, moderately sunny country lying in the path of the celestial Gulf Stream rather than living in an active, volcanic crater situated in the

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infernal supertropics, where—if the reports of eyewitnesses be correct—the heat is sufficiently great to permit men to stew in their own juice, such a performance being unique to those regions and inconceivable elsewhere, certainly not on this earth, which is the best possible sort of place, at all events for Vicar and Devil, recruiting sergeants for Heaven and Hell.

UNIVERSAL SPEECH OF MONEY

For the time being, Gombarov was content to take a page out of the practical man's book: "See your own country first." He did not take this too literally, in its provincial sense, in the sense that a caterpillar accepts one head of cabbage, if a large one, as its complete and self-sufficient world, but accepted the earth as a country distinct merely from the aforesaid countries. It was as possible nowadays for a man to circumnavigate the earth as it is for a caterpillar to make a complete circuit round a cabbage. Through its fast railways, liners, telegraphs, the world was one country, and as he had learnt on his journey, it had one universal medium of speech: money. One had but to flash a letter of credit, an American Express cheque-book, a Bank of England note, a mark, krone or rouble note, a green- or a yellow-back, and, best of all, a gold sovereign, an eagle, or a double eagle. With it, one had but to mention the name of a place one wished to go to, the name of a favourite dish, of a favourite wine. Somehow, once you showed people your money, you invariably got what you wanted. Money talks, as the saying goes: and it talks to good effect, one language, or all, as you choose.

By some inexplicable association of ideas, Gombarov's strange dream seemed to have unlatched the doors behind which reposed his newly gathered memories; and the thought of money and of his own purse, whose too meagre contents



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were all he could show after years of assiduous industry, brought to his mind the strange individual he had met on board the steamer on the way to Naples, a tall, lanky, energetic American of about forty. He remembered speaking to the man and bewailing the fact that he was going to Italy without a knowledge of the language. The dry-witted man replied:

"You don't want to know the language. You don't want to know any language. You want to show the colour of your money. Why, you can go to Indo-China, and you bet you won't find any of those Hindu-Chinks colour-blind. No, not they. Nor those Espagnoles, Frenchies, or Dagoes, for that matter. There's this about money. You can smell as well as see it. You can hear it, too, so far as that goes. The right kind of money makes the proper kind of noise. Nothing like the clink of gold to make people sit up and take notice. You can't hide it. Once you have it, you can be dressed in rags, and people will steer towards you as steel towards a magnet. In fact, it appeals to all the five senses, and the sixth, if there is one. Other people can have Esperanto and Volapük, which won't buy you your car fare. As for me, I am all for the simoleons as an international lingo. Carry your lingo in your purse, my boy, and you can't go wrong. Those Dagoes will understand you, if you imitate the jabber of a monkey."

Gombarov, annoyed by the man's cocksure attitude, which reminded him of the disturbing slimness of his own purse, mildly remonstrated:

"I quite agree with you about Esperanto and Volapük, though for different reasons. A people's soul is in its language, and a neutral language would kill that. All the same, aren't you attaching too much importance to money?"

"You can't attach too much importance to money," the other interrupted him.

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"There's this to be said for the Esperantists," resumed Gombarov, "they are trying to create an international language so that men of various nations may exchange ideas, become friendly and avoid war." It was not what was in his mind, but the other's attitude had aroused his antagonism, and he was prepared to defend even Esperanto, with which he was far from sympathetic.

"Delighted that you've brought the matter up, my boy," said the lanky man, rubbing his hands. "It's money again that's going to put an end to all wars. It's the invention of money that's repaired the original mistake of Babel. Why, man!" he exclaimed, seizing Gombarov by the lapel of his coat, "Europe hasn't had a real decent war for forty years, nothing since the Franco-Prussian war. It's money that's done it. International finance. International exchange. International credits. Nothing can knock that tower down. The world's one small country. Don't you see, my boy"—the speaker enthusiastically tugged at Gombarov's coat—"don't you see? It stands to reason that a world bound together as one country can't fight against itself. That's where international finance comes in. You don't suppose that financiers with banks in all countries would be such chumps as to cut their own throats? When Kaiser Bill, or King George or the Tsar of Russia is spoiling for a fight, there's always a King of Finance to whisper the word in his ear, and instead of fighting, the royal duffer goes into his garden and gets it out of his system by tramping down the grass with his parade boots on. Besides, there's not a country that can do without the other. One country has all the coal, another the iron, another the wheat, another the cotton, and so on. The way they depend on one another, they might be, to all intents and purposes, one country. Yes, my



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boy, money is a cement. There's nothing like it to hold countries or men together."

"That's all very well," protested Gombarov, "but how can you explain the building of battleships and the keeping up of great armies?"

"Give me a harder one. That's to guarantee peace, of course. These are used only against the niggers, savages and the little brigand countries, the only disturbers of peace to-day. War will cease as soon as the big countries have gobbled up the little ones and given them the benefits of civilisation. That's where money—big business—comes in. And building battleships gives men work, keeps them out of mischief. It's big business that holds the world together, and don't you forget it!"

Gombarov involuntarily shuddered. He didn't like this talk of big business. He was interested in big art. He knew that big business and big art were not friends.

"Do you mind telling me what business you are in?" he asked after a pause.

"Not at all," the other replied, drawing out a card, which he handed to Gombarov, who read:

MR. HEZEKIAH WOOD,
Representative of the

INTERNATIONAL EMBALMING COMPANY

HEAD OFFICE: New York. **BRANCHES:** Boston,
Chicago, San Francisco, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg,
Tokyo, Hong Kong, etc.

As Gombarov looked up somewhat puzzled, Hezekiah Wood proceeded to explain:

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"We've discovered a new process for preserving human corpses, which beats the Egyptian process to a frazzle. We are anxious to place its benefits before every man, woman and child in the world. There's nothing like being dead properly. And we give a guarantee for a thousand years at least."

"What, a thousand years!" exclaimed Gombarov, incredulously, and scrutinised the man to see if he was sane. "What proof can you give, if the process has only just been invented?"

"We've seen to that. You see, we've invented a decomposing machine, which accelerates the process of decomposition—to be precise, it approximates a speed of five years to the minute,—and we've tried it on ordinary corpses and on corpses treated by our method, and it's stood the test. We give a written guarantee, and the corpse's grandchildren or great grandchildren are at liberty to sue the company and get their money back at compound interest."

As if he had read a question in Gombarov's mind, he exclaimed:

"Don't you worry! We expect to bring ancestry into good repute again by advertising. And I dare say, we'll do a thriving business in China, where they reverence their ancestors properly. There are so many Chinks, too! It's a proper shame, by the way,"—the steamer was then passing the Rock of Gibraltar—"it's a proper shame the way that rock is wasted. We'd pay the British Government handsomely to let us decorate that rock with our ad. At night we'd have blazing lights in real Broadway and Forty-second Street style. We might even have a dying figure calling for our process, and a suitable text, 'In the midst of life we are in death,' a gentle reminder to men on ships passing in the night, which they can put into their noddle and remember as they pass on to three continents."



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Again Gombarov involuntarily shuddered, as he thought of how only a few days before they had gotten a wireless message on ship board, announcing the down-going of the Titanic, and of the gloom it had cast upon the crew and the passengers, whose self-sufficiency suffered from Nature's reminder that Man had not conquered her. He looked again at his vis-à-vis, and found an excuse to get away. It was quite clear that Hezekiah Wood was not a madman, but a thoroughly practical business man, with an eye on the main chance.

UNIVERSAL SPEECH OF ART

Gombarov's mind, now more awake, went back to his dream. And back again to Hezekiah Wood, the preserver of corpses. Suddenly it occurred to him: there was something in the half shadowy being who had walked beside him in the dream that reminded him of the promoter of international embalming. But, in an explicable way, it also reminded him of someone else. Who?

Perhaps there had never been any Hezekiah Wood, and this personage and the whole conversation was but a figment of his fancy, a fantastic thread woven into the not less fantastic texture of his dream. Gombarov stretched out a hand towards the small table by his bed and picked up a copy book, his Diary, in which he had set down the most significant episodes that had occurred to him since he started on his pilgrimage. He turned to a date in April, and found his conversation with Hezekiah Wood recorded there.

One thing, then, was certain: Hezekiah—he, somehow, thought of him just as Hezekiah, without the surname—this Hezekiah was a real personage, real in spite of his having appeared in the dream. And yet, that feeling of there having been two persons, possibly a double entity in one, persisted.

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Mechanically he turned the pages of his Diary, his eyes pausing at a name here and there. Suddenly his eyes fixed themselves on a recent entry made in Paris, and he exclaimed:

"Ah, I know. It's William Douglass!"

That was strange. It was incredible that two persons so antithetic should mix themselves up, even in a dream. To his mind, Douglass as surely represented Big Art as Hezekiah Big Business. The strangest part was that there were essential points at which their arguments touched and even harmonized. For both the world had shrunk, was no longer wide and flat, but like a cabbage, or an orange, had become palpably round, had gained and asserted its third, and possibly its fourth, dimension. For both, the world in its contractedness was moving towards a unity of speech, though for the one the medium of international exchange was money, for the other art.

It was to be a remembered evening in Gombarov's development when he first called at Douglass's studio, in the company of Mrs. Gwynne and her daughter Winifred, that graceful, Botticellian-limbed girl, with her high-poised small dark quattrocento head, who had beguiled him and made his life pendulate between heaven and hell. But the telling of how this pair, having administered a double dose of wormwood to him in the City of Brotherly Love and witnessed his crucifixion there, had come into his life again in Paris, must take its turn in the meanderings of Gombarov's brain that morning, in the stream of recent memories which so curiously and inexplicably had its source in his dream.

Douglass's studio was situated in a small street off the Boulevard Montparnasse. The door was opened to the visitors by Miss Sylvia Brent, who lived amicably with Douglass without the legal formality of marriage. She was an artist on her own,



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had interests in common with him; and the chief difference between their pictures, as Gombarov noted later, was that she went in for curves, Douglass for angles. She was a large good-natured creature, all curves herself, and through the diaphanous texture of her white blouse two broad, pink ribbons were visible on the curves of her breasts, like dawns on mountains. Over her shoulders she wore a thin, many-coloured silken shawl, such as he had not seen since he had left Italy. This passion for bright colour was even more evident once you entered the studio. Spectral yellows, violent greens, flaming reds, strident blues and violets, sprawled about in great flaunting splashes on the canvases, on the draperies on the walls and screens, on the cushions on the large divan and the settees and chairs. On the table stood a bowl of vegetables and fruits, such as bananas, pimentos, blood-red apples, tomatoes, green figs, an egg-plant and a pomegranate slashed in two—the whole apparently arranged for a still-life. Surely, these people had captured the rainbow and had taken it apart to decorate the studio with its components.

Douglass himself, a man of about thirty-five, greeted the visitors simply and heartily. Oddly enough, he did not cultivate the artistic in his person. His medium, robust figure flaunted no velvet jacket, his clean firm face no hirsute ornaments, his hard, well-shaped head no hair that a shrewish wife might clutch at with any comfort. He wore an ordinary drab suit, an ordinary collar and ordinary tie that was held together with an ordinary pin; he was, at all events outwardly, an individual in no wise different from Hezekiah. He looked strangely out of place in that large room with its torrential blaze of colour.

“Can he be an artist?” thought Gombarov, as he made a quick survey of his own artistic figure in the red-framed glass

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opposite to which he happened to sit. He took a pride in his long luxuriant hair that fell in natural ringlets over his forehead and in his large black wing tie made for him by Winifred's fingers. Again he reflected: how infinitely nicer than Miss Brent his own slender Winifred looked in her home-made, quaintly decorative costume, fitting her sinuous virginal form like water and suggesting faintly, yet with precision, the delicate if firm modelling of her small, not too small, breasts: a twin adornment which gives a woman her bearing, a poet something on which to write couplets, and the fortunate man a place to pillow his head.

He was lost in his reflections, as was his habit even in company, until awakened out of them by Mrs. Gwynne's shrill American voice.

"John, come and see Mr. Douglass's paintings."

Gombarov, Winifred and Miss Brent rose simultaneously from their chairs and went to the other end of the large studio, where Douglass was putting a picture on an easel. Mrs. Gwynne was by no means a connoisseur of painting, but Douglass, in spite of his somewhat austere face, was kind and, above all, child-like, expecting others to understand the play of his mind and even to share in it. This, however, was not so simple a matter for minds whose art appreciations had no opportunity of developing beyond Impressionism. Even Gombarov, who had mingled and kept abreast with the American "moderns," was nonplussed on beholding the new art, as practised by Douglass.

There was an audible silence lasting some minutes, while the visitors studied the picture and its strange angular figures, which half resembled human beings, half mechanical contrivances, painted in broad patterns, in almost primal greens, yellows and reds.



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Gombarov was afraid to look at the artist. Was the man mad? He re-experienced the emotions he had had some weeks before in the presence of Hezekiah; but at last, taking courage, looked up. Douglass's face was simple and benign, without a trace of the fanatic; the common sense usually ascribed to the Scot seemed to mark the hardy features as emphatically as it had marked the face of the Yankee promoter.

"What's the subject of this picture?" he finally asked, burning with a curiosity to get at the bottom of the mystery. The intensity of his curiosity overcame his shyness; he was keenly aware of the danger of committing a *faux pas*.

"In the exhibition catalogue I called it the 'Beginning of the End,'" replied the artist, "though I had thought of calling it 'The Hashish Eaters.' I had got the idea," he proceeded to explain, "on a visit to an underground cabaret at Montmartre. One of the tables in a little corner by itself was occupied by a group of haggard looking figures, three men and a woman, who were pointed out to me as hashish fiends in the last stages of their ruin. I don't know whether you are familiar with the effects of hashish. As I looked at them and studied them, I tried to enter their skins, to reconstruct their lives, as I saw them in my imagination. It first occurred to me that they had lived fast, at an accelerated, one might say, mechanical speed. With them a single step has been as a mile, an instant as an eternity, a street lamp as the sun, a two-story shack as a castle. Their sky was covered with so many moons instead of stars. And as I watched them, it seemed to me that now and then I detected a look of the inevitable in their eyes, as if they saw a grave—not a mere hole, but an abyss, opening before their eyes . . . the consciousness of the débris of their dream castles falling, or about to fall, about their ears . . . their last illusions crumbling. I

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have tried to set all this down in the picture, what their sensations must be in terms of my art."

Gombarov studied the picture more closely, keeping the artist's explanation in mind as one does the programme notes in listening to a piece of music. The effect was as elusive. He was baffled by this conglomeration of angles, steel-like and mechanical in structure, riveted together to form a pattern incomprehensible to him. He could not understand why the figures had angular heads, angular mouths, angular hands and feet, manipulated—it seemed—on hinges; why they drank out of angular cups, and why the angular lamps from above cast angular lights and shadows on their angular contours; and all around them there appeared to be a chaos of falling girders.

"The idea, as you tell it," ventured Gombarov, is a fine one, but frankly, I cannot understand your way of expressing it. Do you mind explaining your method?"

"Not at all," said Douglass. "Not at all. I am, first of all, a man of my own age. This is not an age of knights and ladies. It is a scientific age, an age of engineering and mechanics. The dominating factor is the machine. The machine has given the world a unity it has not had before. Through its fast ships, railways and telegraphs, its manufactured products, the world has gained an amazing sameness. It is fast killing nationality and local colour. To be in harmony with his own time, a modern artist's duty is to record and express the spirit that moves the modern world, and he cannot do this otherwise than by adopting the principles of science and becoming as universal and abstract as science itself. The Impressionists began the revolution by adopting science's superficialities, the colours of the spectrum and the vibration of light. We, artists of today, go further by showing the very



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soul of science; that is, the soul of our age. The soul of the machine, if you like."

"Has the machine a soul?" asked Gombarov.

"Good Lord, yes!" said Douglass, and added, smiling, "To be sure, it's not the soul of a young lady. It is a pitiless, relentless, conquering soul."

Gombarov was seized with a momentary bitterness, as he thought of Winifred and of how, though a young lady, she had been pitiless and relentless to him, and of how, with her soft hands, she had conquered him. It was true, she was his again, but his heart was full of misgiving for the future. There was a silence. Then he heard Douglass's voice again:

"Yes, science has made the world one, and has given the world one speech. Yes, even in the arts nationality is being killed, and soon the paintings of one country will be like the paintings of another country. Artists will be regarded with the same universal detachment as scientists. The scientist Mendelejeff is a Russian, but there's no reason at all why he should not be a Frenchman. Universal speech in the arts is being accomplished at last."

Strange! That was precisely what Hezekiah had said of money. Was there, then, some connection between the colour of money and the colour of a modern artist's paint? Possibly, since Big Business and Big Art were apparently founded on the same principle, that of the machine. Gombarov refrained from speaking his thought.

The artist took down the picture from the easel and replaced it with another, this time obviously a still-life, consisting of some bananas, apples, a liqueur bottle and the heading of the *Petit Parisien* in the background. The letters of the newspaper heading sprawled across the picture and dominated it. The fruit was such as he had never seen before. It might

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have been manufactured at Sheffield. Its edges were angular, hard and sharp. It looked indigestible.

"One may express the spirit of the world even in a still-life," observed Douglass. "A banana or an apple is a world in itself; in fact, every object is a microcosm, so far as the artist is concerned. Take a banana. There is no reason why an artist should not apply the problem of engineering to a banana; none at all. It is a piece of construction, a geometrical form like any other, a perfectly related shape, a piece of mechanics that is as wonderful in its way as the Firth Bridge or a New York skyscraper."

"Where does human personality come in?" interrupted the persistent Gombarov.

"I had expected you to ask that," said Douglass. "No one asks that question about a piece of music by Bach. Yet no art more than music, especially by Bach, is subject to such hide-bound mathematical laws and geometric patterns. Now, you wouldn't say that there is no humanity in that music or that the composer's personality doesn't shine in every phrase of his work? Take that banana again—"

"I'd rather not!" said Gombarov, with a laugh, in which the rest joined.

"The fundamental geometrics of that banana," went on Douglass, "are its own, but the nuances of its shape and colour and the play of light are all mine, and are the product of my temperament in a certain mood at a given time of day, all scientifically inter-related. A thousand circumstances, however petty, which have a mathematical relation to one another, but which would seem impossible to calculate mathematically, may have gone to produce the banana as it is on the canvas. But I can imagine that a different set of circumstances, equally inter-related, would produce a different effect. Suppose,



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instead of painting it in a calm mood, I had painted it in a temper. Say, I had been to see a woman. She thwarted me. Made me angry. I have come into my studio. I am seeing red. I set to painting that banana. That banana is usually yellow, but today I am seeing it red. I am not only painting it red, but am adding geometrical nuances of light and form which contain the psychology of my personal dynamics. But my particular mood is never master, but is always controlled by my geometrics, my modern technique, which merely builds up forms to contain my serenity, or my temper, or my exultation, as the case may be. Now, Sylvia's art is quite different. . . ."

"Yes, I am a reaction from William," said Miss Brent, laughing, as she took up the cue. Like most young artists, she wanted her own work to be talked about.

"Do show us your pictures," suggested Mrs. Gwynne, who could always be expected to do the polite thing.

Then they all followed Miss Brent through a partition in the draperies, which separated her half of the studio from Douglass's.

"I mean," said Miss Brent, taking up the thread of her thought, where she had left off, "I react from the scientific spirit of the age. I believe we are too sophisticated; so I go in for the primitive." And she began hunting among the canvases piled up against the wall.

"Show them 'Victory!'" suggested Douglass.

"Here it is!" exclaimed Miss Brent, as she pulled out a canvas and placed it on the easel.

It was to Gombarov an extraordinary picture. A huge fat negress, who was as closely related to the hippopotami as to the human species, was emerging with a stride from a jungle of green, giant-leaved plants, which loomed upward in a series of broad curves. The negress, ebony and shiny, had a tomtom

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slung from her neck and covering her tight, rounded belly. She was beating the tomtom wildly and clamorously. Her elongated breasts hung down like two miniature tomtoms, being of the exact shape. Her wild, wavy hair, flung back to match the stride of her legs, only half revealed the curves of the large ivory ear-rings. Another large white ring was in her broad flat nose. No opportunity was lost to add another, and still another curve. The meaning of the picture was plain enough.

"A French critic has called it the modern 'Victory of Samothrace,'" said Douglass.

"I have tried to show," explained Miss Brent, "that the primitive instincts still rule the world, in spite of all science. But one thing William and I have in common: we no longer speak in local dialects. We are trying to create a language which the whole world will understand . . ."

And so on, and so on.

Gombarov argued the new ideas with his hosts at length, and when he left he felt all wrought up over his latest experience. His mind was in a state of fierce conflict. He had rather taken a liking to the two persons; he saw that they had spoken with sincerity and conviction; he even recognised the plausibility and logic of their theories; altogether they appeared to be sensible, reasonable people. And yet there were those terrible pictures! A phrase of Douglass's kept on coming back to him: "Art's effort in the past has been to seduce. Its aim today is to violate." That was it, then! That was why he had felt so wrought up, so unreasonably in a temper. His own mind, long fostered on different concepts of beauty, had suffered from attempted violation. Otherwise he could not explain his feelings. But why should there be



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this desire on the part of artists to violate? Time would tell, perhaps.

He visited several art exhibitions and saw pictures even more violent in colour and design than Douglass's or Miss Brent's, whereupon his mind became a seething kettle of questionings and doubts. He was discreet enough not to laugh as he had seen others do. He knew that the Impressionists had been also laughed at when they first appeared. But if these men were really mad, it was surely no laughing matter. One madman may be the butt of sane men, but there was no laughing at a madhouse. If these men were mad, they were so with a method. He had had time to learn that the maddest of them could draw in a masterly normal manner, which they had wilfully forsaken for this new art.

"Most strange of all,"—ran a passage in his Diary—"after visiting these modern exhibitions, you go to a public gallery of old masters, and the feelings you experience are not the same as before seeing the new pictures. Somehow, serene and beautiful as always, they have grown more reticent, remote and mysterious; as if they had suddenly made up their minds to hide themselves behind their own shadows, or to shroud themselves behind their centuries. Coming from a modern exhibition to these, I feel as if I had come from a maddeningly dazzling room into a room of twilight and dusk, a room of beautiful dim masks with arrested expressions, of felicitous moments out of the great past, caught and imprisoned in the cage of eternity. Why, then, am I being helplessly drawn to those other pictures produced by apparently maddened brains? Has my mind been actually violated by these and is it now being drawn to its violators; or is it that they do represent the life of today, and that it is life itself, such as it is, that draws me?"

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UNIVERSAL SPEECH OF INANIMATE OBJECTS

What a strange three months these had been, since he had left home! thought Gombarov. And once more his mind wandered back to the dream. How amusing that bit about the watch giving out a gramphonic cacophony! Why was he constantly returning to the dream? Why did diurnal reality and nocturnal vision so intricably mix themselves up, so you could not tell one from the other? He was possessed by an intense quite unaccountable feeling, a conviction wholly sensational, having no connection with the brain, that the dream he had dreamt was a concentrated, as it were, a distilled essence, of his experiences during his brief wanderings. At last he was in the Europe he had longed to see, with a native's longing; and now Europe was such a strange mixture of the old and the new, of the mellow reality of old dreams and of the assertive blatancy of incoherent newness.

He looked round him again. He was obviously in a room of an old house, once a family residence, now fitted up as a hotel. An old oaken beam, cracked in places, supported the low ceiling; and from this beam an electric light hung down over the chest of drawers in front of the mirror. He was lying in a huge iron, brass-knobbed bed, its legs on casters. The usual wash-stand, with all the customary paraphernalia, stood in the far corner of the room. A large upholstered cosy chair, worse for use, stood half-tottering near-by; his clothes lay on it in disarray. The windows were overhung with familiar, frippery white lace curtains, parted in the middle; reinforced by worn drab blinds, which, as they were in poor working order, Gombarov did not take the trouble to draw down. Once more his gaze fell upon the two pictures. And he recalled that the lavatory arrangements bore the name of



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an English firm, and that the steam-radiators in the hall had been made in America.

The inanimate objects in the room spoke a universal language, since, in the matter of usage, they were not peculiar to any one country. He had seen them in Philadelphia, Buffalo, Boston, Hoboken, Rome, and he did not doubt that he would see them in Bloomsbury.

How many nationalities, how many international couples, had lain in that same bed, whose loosened springs now thrust themselves through the worn international mattress into his sides?

The house was French, and it was old; the objects it contained came from many lands, and were new. It was hard to tell whether the old house resented it, or whether an old bottle resents a new wine; or again, whether a new wine resents an old bottle. And all that he had thus far seen of Europe was like that: an old bottle fermenting a new wine. Was not that a symbol of Europe?

The people themselves who owned and used these things seemed to be old, very old. The very dogs, reflecting their masters, did not bark at one, and regarded strangers quietly and sleepily. Life was restful after America. Only the new inanimate objects were blatant; machines and products manufactured by machines obtruded themselves and dislodged the old things, which were essentially national and characterised by the quality called "local colour." Civilisation, it seemed to him, was moving, all but in its architecture, towards a standardisation of life. But architecture, the hallmark of any civilisation, in a sense, did not exist at all. He remembered how he had marvelled when he first looked upon old Florence and noted its architectural unity; above all, the wonder that filled him, when he saw for the first time the aspiring, harmo-

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nious shapes of old cathedrals, and realised that a whole people had poured its soul into these shapes of long making. What he saw, however, of the new architecture struck him as being a medley, not at all unlike the medley of tunes he had heard in his dream.

Everywhere appeared to be this violation of the old by the new.

UNIVERSAL SPEECH OF LOVE

Under the stress of his new experiences, his waking mind was also becoming a medley of discordant tunes. One clear, inviolate note, however, was radiantly audible amid the clatter of this cacophony of crowding impressions; and to this slender exquisite music, the integral part of him, as deep-rooted as the trees of the Russian forest in which he had lived his childhood, returned again and again, with a persistence that astonished him.

It was his love of Winifred.

Love has always been, from the time that Adam knew Eve, the most universal of languages. And not all the falling débris of the tower of Babel has succeeded in separating scattered, fleeing lovers.

Hence, "all mankind loves a lover"; and a lover loves the whole world. In embracing his love, the world's equatorial line contracts to the slenderness of his love's waist; while the temperate zones are quite absent. There would seem to be no apparent connection between science and love; yet their creative processes and effects are not unlike. Science's girding arm around the willingly or unwillingly yielding earth make the world small; a man's virile arm around a willing woman's waist reduces the world to a microcosm. The whole world is where the woman is; is in the woman. So much has one



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conquered, whether with science or with love. All of which belongs to the metaphysics of conquest.

But suppose the earth did not yield, and angrily cast up her eruptions and landslides, buried man's railways and canals, and called upon her brother Ocean to sink ships and her brother Wind to fling down telegraph wires; then the earth has not been conquered. Suppose, again, a woman did not yield, or yielded unwillingly, withheld her caresses, and cast up hostile fire out of her unsubmitting heart, overwhelming her lover; then the woman has not been conquered.

That was his trouble. He loved Winifred, and she was his again. But he was not sure of her. He had loved for years, he had loved her always, he had nearly gone mad for her, but he was not sure of her. Not sure of her.

It was strange how she had come back to him. Come back to him after forsaking him. He was not sure of her because he had loved her so, and she had loved him so; and she had forsaken him after loving him so. And she had now come back to him. After handing him a cup of wormwood. After her mother had handed him a cup of wormwood. He had drunk both cups to the last dregs. Winifred's "Don't be dramatic!" on their parting at the railway station in Philadelphia; her mother's "Be a man!" at the same time, at the same place. After they had loved him so. After he had loved them so.

He had never expected to meet them again. Though he had received letters from them. They had gone abroad before him. They had gone before him, he after them. After them, in the matter of time. That is, not after *them*. He would have gone, anyhow. He had to go. Somewhere. He could not live in that *cul-de-sac* any longer, after they had forsaken him. He would have gone mad if he had stayed on there.

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But they wrote to him. Kept on writing to him. He had received a letter in Naples, begging him to see them in Paris on his way to London. He had given up hope of her, yet entertained a secret hope deep down in his heart, a secret hope with a stone round its neck, that all was not lost, that she would write, that she would come back to him. And she did come back to him; but, as she had forsaken him once, he was not sure of her.

It was terrible not to be sure of a thing. Of a thing you loved. Of someone who loved you. He wanted the eternal. Love to him meant the eternal. If it was not eternal, then it was not love. Was he, then, old-fashioned? But can one call what is eternal, what is changeless, old-fashioned? An old tune went on recurring in his mind, eternal and inviolate. The eternal is inviolate.

But she—what of her? She was a medley of emotions, many tunes in one, inter-violating. She was a thing of nuance, a many-plumed bird, in which, above others, he loved one plume. But every plume, every distinct tint of her, wanted, cried for another lover, was likely to draw to her another lover. A remark she had casually dropped gave him his first inkling of it.

He remembered, how well he remembered, what she had said, as they sat one evening together, at the *Café de la Paix*, and watched the crowd pass by, like a dark sluggish water, on and on, seeking to escape stagnation, little streams diverting themselves into gayer side channels, here and there a live ripple showing in the shape of a *très chic* courtesan, a bait in her laughing eyes, a language any man could understand.

Winifred, intercepting one of these glances, thrown at a male by a silk-stockinged, tight-skirted she-devil, stopped sipping her *café au lait* and remarked:



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"I can understand a woman loving five or six men, but I can't understand her taking up with so many."

"You are wicked to say that," said her mother.

"No, I'm not!" said Winifred.

Gombarov said nothing.

Deep down at the bottom of him a thought stirred, an inarticulate emotion, a mingled feeling of anger, resentment and sadness, against what underlay Winifred's remark. Its implication was intelligible enough; it made him feel as if he had but a fifth or sixth of her, not all of her. Paris, quickly, too quickly! was scratching her puritanic skin, made in America, and revealing as yet lightly, underneath, the seven suppressed devils of seven suppressed generations which had chosen her as their habitation. But the whole truth of this Gombarov had not surmised at the time, just as he no more than dimly suspected the presence of the several devils which lurked inside his own unscratched skin. Her remark carried a poisoned barb that pierced deep; and the wound was such as would have afflicted any man who had heard his goddess blaspheme.

Though he wanted her, he had not asked her to come back. She had come back to him of her own will. He hardly knew why she had come back. Very likely, he thought, she had missed him in the months of absence, since that sad, unseemly parting in Philadelphia. Possibly, his virtues as a lover gained in the perspective of time and space. Had not a former love of his, the elfin Muriel, once confessed to him that she always grew more desperately fond of him when he was away? Which signified something or nothing, according to the light in which one judged this deliciously ironic *double entendre*. Nevertheless, it gave him a subtle pleasure: the thought that he had

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not encouraged Winifred to come back to him, that she had come back to him of her own accord.

On arriving in Paris, he had, on her invitation, called at their little flat, and to keep his feelings from bursting their flood-gates, he had, on this visit, brought along with him Alfred Welsh, a young painter of cockney extraction whom he had picked up at Naples, and who, by the time they reached Paris, had become an intolerable nuisance.

"When did you arrive?" was Winifred's first question after the greetings were over.

"The day before yesterday," replied Gombarov, who noted a hurt gleam in her eyes.

She seemed genuinely glad to see him, but there was a constraint on both sides. It was evident that the presence of the stranger piqued her. More than an hour passed in polite conversation, in which Mrs. Gwynne joined. And all the while Gombarov and Winifred watched one another with furtive looks, as if each wished to ferret out some secret in the other's heart. Again that pathetic, child-like look in her eyes, the look that first captivated him; and pity, still so strong in him at that period of his life, responded to it with a helpless attraction. But she had so determinedly and so definitely forsaken him in the hour of his need, when he had clung to her with his last oozing strength, with a faith which, he had thought, would conquer her. He now thought he saw indications of her wanting him. He would have given in; but for the stranger he might have given in; but his pride prevailed. With a stiffened back and erect neck, he arose decisively, almost abruptly. With him rose the rest of the company. Mrs. Gwynne discreetly led Welsh into the vestibule.

Left alone to themselves, Gombarov and Winifred looked



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intently into each other's eyes; but their manner was hesitating, neither said a word.

"Well, good-by," said Gombarov with an effort, and stretched out a hand, even while his pride and his desire were in fierce conflict. He must either seize her in his arms, or go at once.

Instead of taking his proffered hand, she put her own hand on his arm, softly. He felt her hand tremble on his arm, and his whole body responded to this tremor. He felt the iron with which he had, with great effort, infused his back, oozing out of him. He could resist much, but the touch of her hand had always thus acted upon him. Nevertheless, he resisted his desire, and controlling his voice as well as he could, said at last:

"Well?"

"Aren't you coming to see us again?"

Her hand lingered on his arm, hesitant, trembling.

"Us?"

"Me, then."

"Tomorrow?"

"Early, if you like."

"Is ten too early?"

"No, come at ten."

"All right. At ten."

"I'll expect you."

"I'll come. At ten."

"At ten . . ."

So much they could say in trembling voices. They could have gone on reiterating the word "ten," as if ten were a symbolic figure, a delicious figure tinkling like a joy-bell. On the other side of the door, in the vestibule, Welsh's voice

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was persuasively chanting to Mrs. Gwynne of the glories of Paris, of his expert knowledge of them.

It was indiscreet to linger. Winifred's fingers slid gently down Gombarov's arm and released it, while he, moving towards the door, looked back and repeated:

"At ten . . ."

And the inevitable response came back:

"At ten . . ."

He found his hat, shook hands with Mrs. Gwynne, and left with his now thoroughly irritating shadow, who passed by the name of Alfred Welsh, "Alf" for short, "Welsher" for long, by which name, though Gombarov did not then know it, his ardent companion, with good reasons, was known among his London acquaintances.

Once in the street, he heard his companion's voice droning alongside of him. He was thinking with the front of his head; Welsh's remarks were coming in somewhere at the back of it. He was thinking:

"At ten tomorrow . . . And now it's half past five; to be precise, twenty past. That means, there's sixteen hours and forty minutes to wait. It's a long time . . ."

Somewhere at the back of his head he was conscious of Welsh's words effecting an entrance; these were stealthily working their way through the back passages of the brain towards the front . . . It was a full two minutes before he automatically felt impelled to echo Welsh's words.

"Yes, yes," he said, "a splendid girl . . . a splendid girl . . ."

Now their thoughts had reversed positions: his own thoughts at the back of his head went on reiterating with hammer-like beats: "What's that to you? What's that to you? The impudence of you!" But these thoughts remained unuttered.



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"She doesn't know French," persisted Welsh, oblivious of his companion's preoccupation. "Do you think Miss Gwynne would like to take French lessons?"

"Do you mean by the Morgenstern method?" asked Gombarov, as he looked straight at Welsh.

Welsh's face flushed, and Gombarov knew that his question went home. The allusion was to a little colloquy that had passed between them at Naples, when his new acquaintance, in a good-fellowish mood, had boastfully confessed of having an Italian mistress.

"She is a pupil of mine. I am teaching her English. I got her as my mistress by the Morgenstern method."

"The Morgenstern method? What do you mean?"

"Well, you are an innocent!" Welsh laughed. "You see," he proceeded, "this method teaches a language by means of objects. I say to my pupil, 'This is a table.' 'This book is on the table.' 'I walk to the table.' 'I touch the table,' and so on, and so on. Then a day must come when you touch upon the features of anatomy. You say, 'This is an arm.' 'This is a foot.' 'This is the head.' 'The hair is on the head.' 'You have two eyes.' 'The pretty nose is between two blue eyes.' 'Here are the lips' . . . Now, do you get me?"

Yes, Gombarov had understood him thoroughly. It had been superfluous for Welsh to add:

"When you come to the lips, you come to the universal language."

Welsh, wincing under Gombarov's exposure of his intentions, hastened to say:

"Miss Gwynne is a nice girl, and I merely wanted to be useful to her."

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"Oh, I know," retorted Gombarov, "but I assure you they are poor, and haven't any money to spare for lessons."

"Who spoke of money?" said Welsh, flaring up. "You needn't remind me of the money I owe you. I'll pay up."

"But you promised me some when you got to Paris."

"I've forgotten to show you the wire I got from my brother in London, today. Here it is," and he pulled out a crumpled telegram from his pocket.

Gombarov read:

"Borrow from friend. Will pay in London. William."

Gombarov plainly showed his chagrin, and said:

"Frankly, Alf, I haven't any more money to spare. I have lent you six or seven pounds, and have stood for a good many of your meals. That's a lot of money to me. I've been putting my pennies by for years to come to Europe, and I shall need every penny I've got if I'm to stay a while. It wasn't right of you at Venice to buy a Venetian shawl and other trinkets out of the money I lent you for your journey. Because I bought the same things is no excuse. And now you tell me that the money you expected from your brother is not coming. I'll help you if you go to London at once. I can't do more."

"Don't you worry. I'll pay you in London," said Welsh, in a hurt way.

Meal time was approaching. He was contemplating the vision of a sole fried in butter, an *entrecôte* with mashed potatoes and asparagus, pancakes, a bottle of wine, and a black coffee and brandy liqueur to wind up with—and afterwards, perhaps, a visit to a café, or even to a cabaret.

As for Gombarov, now lost in silence, he was thinking of Winifred and wondering what the hour of ten next morning



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held for him. He would, of course, have to get rid, somehow, of his dogging friend.

Gombarov did not sleep that night, but gave himself up to wakeful dreaming. Idyllic visions of Winifred came to him, draped and undraped visions of love, images serene and fluttering. In his bed, at the other end of the room, Welsh snored. Gombarov cursed those snores, though it was not these which kept him awake. He cursed them, the loud, the ugly, for breaking in upon the music that for the short while sang in his soul, for violating the beautiful. And he asked himself the question that he had asked before and would ask again: Why was there seldom long peace for the beautiful, why must it be broken by obtrusive ugliness, the eternally violative? Was it that beauty, perfection, is nearly always frail, vulnerable; the barbaric nearly always strong, aggressive; and there is infinite attraction in brutish forces towards frailty? Yet he, too, for all his pulsating sense of beauty, had, at times, the barbarian awaking in him, when Winifred's frailty inspired in him an intense desire for undisputed possession, that he might crush her in his arms and destroy her utterly; a frequent mood which flamed intenser since the day he had surrendered to frailty's small white hands, which had hurt him so.

During these past months of his foresakenness, he had done everything to smother this ravishing flame that had turned upon him and was consuming him. In spite of much effort he could not forget those first days of sharp ache which fiercely played upon every nerve; then its subsidence into a monotonous half-deadened pain, like a dulled, eternal toothache, never quite stilled, ever throbbing at the roots, spasmodically breaking out in fiercer torments, louder crescendos of despair, ceaseless in their calling for fresh balms, ointments of forgetfulness. These pains awakened other, older pains, the born

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pains of the Semite, the acquired, accumulated pains of his childhood on Russia's dreamy woodland, and the nightmare pains forced upon him from his tenth year onward in an American industrial city, the to him fantastic man-created inferno, though it bore over its portals the ironic inscription, *The City of Brotherly Love*, that had seduced the Gombarovs, had seduced many. The practically parentless days at home; the sleepless, comfortless nights as a newsboy; the dull, aching weeks and months as a factory hand; the absurdly condescending days and nights, stretching into months and years, as an office boy; the dragging years of enduring while he rose to the responsible position of sub-editor on the *New World*; all the pains of those too long years had come to a head when Winifred forsook him. Winifred, with her small, frail hands, might have saved him, but she had forsaken him; and he, urged by this last circumstance, bolted his prison, but to find himself in the endless corridors of the world, now reflected in his awakened maze-like mind.

Oddly enough, with it all, he was one of those child-like persons, in whom hope blazes anew on the slightest provocation. Life may betray; but he went from betrayal to betrayal, anticipating betrayal, yet hoping that at last he might alight where there was no betrayal. His was a fatalism that did not shut out hope, and his logic did not exclude faith.

Thus, with his descending and ascending thoughts, he spent the long night, after his meeting with Winifred in Paris; and in his pendulating between lugubrious memories and thoughts of Winifred's returning, he did not take the latter assumption for granted, but prayed, even while Welsh snored, that the miracle he had repeatedly asked for might come to pass. At eight o'clock he rose, quite hectic, hardly tired.

An hour afterward Welsh opened his eyes, and looked



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wonderingly at Gombarov, now dressed in his best suit and arranging his wing tie.

"What's up?" he asked, suspiciously.

"I'm going out to breakfast. I have an appointment at ten."

"When will you be back?"

"I don't know . . . But if you are short of cash for meals I can let you have a little." And Gombarov handed Welsh a ten-franc note.

"I suppose it's that girl. . . ." said Welsh insinuatingly, picking up the note.

"Well, what if it is?"

"Oh, I've just mentioned it. There's no harm in that, is there?"

Gombarov made no reply. He hunted in his suit-case for a handkerchief; then put his grey felt hat on and walked out.

He finished breakfast by half-past nine and spent twenty minutes in strolling up and down the Boulevard Montparnasse, counting the minutes as before he had counted the hours. The last ten minutes he devoted to *her* street, waiting impatiently for the church clock round the corner to strike. Again and again he pulled out his watch, which went on ticking, steadily, much too steadily, "Yes—no! Yes—no! Yes—no!" wholly unresponsive to the eager, too eager, beats of his heart. Which it was to be, he did not yet know. Only a flicker in her eyes, a slight momentary flicker, as she had laid her hand on his arm, encouraged him to believe that she was wanting him.

At last the incredibly loud peals of the church clock came down on his fluttering heart; swooped down with a flapping as of broad wings, scattering the flocks of moments that had beset him with their fretful clamour. He gathered courage, and, his body all taut, entered the open door of the house

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and walked up the narrow stairs. He stopped on the first landing and struck hard with the antique brass knocker under the figure 3. He heard the scurrying of light, slippersed foot-falls; and soon the door opened slightly. Winifred's small dark head came half peering from behind it, like a veiled Arabian girl's.

"Is that you, John?" came the familiar deep tones, which played on his heart, as they had played when he first met her, so long, long ago. "Come in!"

"Have you had breakfast?" asked Mrs. Gwynne. "I suppose you have. We are just having ours. Have a coffee!"

Over coffee they exchanged notes of their journeys.

"When I was in Nürnberg. . . ." Mrs. Gwynne would often begin, to be followed by Gombarov's "Now, when I was in Florence. . . ." Winifred would burst out laughing each time this was done, and tease them about it.

"The funniest thing on this side are the women," once ventured Winifred, who spoke little. "In German trains it was quite a common thing to see a woman put a hand on a man's knee or shoulder, as if to assert her possession, while the man as often as not sat stolidly, reading a newspaper, or stuffing sandwiches or sausages into his mouth."

"I suppose there is a lot to shock American women on this side," said Gombarov. "There is Naples, to mention an instance. In Naples, the public conveniences for men are very public, indeed. And there are similar annoying things. In my *pension* at Rome I heard some American club women and school teachers talking about it at the next table. They all agreed that it would be a great thing to have Naples at Hoboken, New Jersey, or at Reading, Pennsylvania, for just one wee little week, so they could have the time of their lives 'cleaning it up!'"



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"Mother, you see, he is sarcastic as ever."

"Yes, Winnie. That was a Gombarovian remark. He'll never be cured."

They all laughed. He liked being teased by them, as he had been of old, when they yet loved him. And he would go out of his way to give them every chance.

"Have you been to the Louvre?" asked Winifred.

"Yes," replied Gombarov, "and I heard a fat American in front of Ingres' *Le Bain Turc*, say to his friend: 'A pretty hot bunch, isn't it?'"

"Go on with your tales," laughed Winifred. "Mother, he is being funny this morning."

"What picture is that?" asked Mrs. Gwynne, who could not quite see the joke.

"Oh!" exclaimed Winifred. "It's that one showing a lot of naked women—a couple of dozen or more—lying about like a heap of serpents."

"Oh yes! I know the one!" and Mrs. Gwynne laughed.

"As you've already been to the Louvre, where would you like to go this morning?" asked Winifred. "Have you been to the Luxembourg, or to Notre Dame?"

"No, shall we take them in today?"

They decided to see the Luxembourg first, Notre Dame afterward. Mrs. Gwynne smiled on them as they went out.

Winifred, never demonstrative in public, took his arm; which augured well. On the way, they spoke about everything except that which was uppermost in their minds. At the Luxembourg they spent an hour in seeing and discussing the pictures. But, as when they first met, their eyes and their intonations gave their most irrelevant remark a significance beyond that of ordinary language.

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Silence, tense and pregnant with emotion, has its own audibility, louder than any spoken speech, and grows more and more audible the longer it remains untranslated into speech; even as a gathering cloud goes on and on gathering, until it bursts with its own pent-up gatheredness. Silence, again, is a slow, patient music of one's soul, playing on harps and flutes, and rising in a sudden crescendo in the wild beating of the no longer controllable tympani. Talk may dissipate in talk; silence, too long repressed, urges to action.

The inevitable happened at Notre Dame. They had climbed up the innumerable stairs to the roof. They propped up their elbows on the parapet, near the gargoyles, and together with these leaning grotesques, looked down on that most seductive courtesan among cities, stretched out, supine, in all her grace of natural and studied loveliness. Far in the distance, the Sacré Coeur gleamed white; while below, the Seine appeared like an arrested wind-flung scarf, alight with the shimmering playfulness of the sun. Paris needed no more than this diaphanous garment of golden mist to clothe her shining torso; her charm was intenser for her deshabelle, to which the sun had brought her; the sun her lover, who unloosed her draperies, for whom she smiled. Her temperament was frank, Gallic; her mystery concrete, precise. Who, having seen a day in the spring, in Paris, could live to forget it?

Gombarov lost himself in the contemplation of all this beauty, and of the grotesque beauty of the sharply defined gargoyles against the clear light, and of the ideal beauty of Winifred's small dark bared head against the neighbouring old beauty. She stood leaning over the parapet, in her white dress, her hat in her hand. Her black hair was closely serpented around her head in two circling coils, the ends of which,



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with great art, were arranged shield-like over her ears. Again he noted the half-childish, the half-womanish charm of her profile; in his admiration he quite forgot the suffering she had caused him.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she murmured.

"Yes, very beautiful," he replied.

"We can go still higher, if you like."

"Can we? Yes, let's go higher."

She rearranged her hat on her head, and went to the woman attendant, who sat on a soap box; and said something to her in hesitating French.

The woman, with keys dangling in her hand, went before them, towards a little door, leading to the tower. This she unlocked, and Gombarov, putting a silver coin in her hand, entered in, and followed Winifred up a narrow, incredibly dark stone staircase.

"Be careful!" Winifred called down to him. "It's pitch dark here, the stairs are somewhat rickety; it's quite easy to take a false step."

"Don't say that!" he called out laughingly from below, as he felt his way along the wall.

He heard Winifred's contralto laugh, echoing down to him. He increased his pace, in spite of the darkness, but she seemed to be as far away from him as before.

"Be careful!" she flung down to him.

"I'm trying to keep close behind you," said Gombarov, "so that in case you slip, you'll have something to fall on!"

"You'll have to do better than that," laughed Winifred, double-edgedly.

"I am ready to do better than that!" he retorted, and increased his pace just as the first ray of sunlight fell on a slant, lighting up a part of the stone wall and stairs. His

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head was now on a line with her ankles; when he saw her emerge in the light, it showed her slender legs through the flimsy material of her white dress. The sight caused his playfulness to flare up into passion. For it was a love playfulness, which is ever a prelude to love passion, even as in the golden age when the satyr chased his nymph round and round a tree.

He, too, emerged into the light, dazzling after that darkness. They both laughed, panting with the exertion of the climb. Notwithstanding this laughter, he noted a frightened look in her eyes, and felt the same look creep into his. And unaccountable bonds held back his impassioned arms from her. She took off her hat, rested her head on one side on the parapet; while he stood by, leaning his head on his elbows, and looked down on the city, furtively watching Winifred at the same time. His hands twitched with desire. And yet he was as helpless as if he had never loved before, as if he had just met her and loved her for the first time. It was really worse, as she had loved him before and had forsaken him. And now he was not sure of her. Just a shade of pride crept into this renewed love of his; this, too, held him in check, as he suddenly remembered her forsaking him. A medley of civilised emotions played on him, and hindered him from acting on his natural impulses. Could these, his heritage of the Russian woods, have broken his bond, shattered this complex network of inhibitions, his naturalness might have frightened her. He had her, too, to think of; as she, even more than he, was held by fast bonds, wrought by several generations, beginning with her hard New England ancestors. He was hardly less conscious of her bondage than of his own; that also hindered him.



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Just as he was preparing to act, just as he was painfully raising an arm to encircle her waist, a sound of laughter came up from the staircase; and presently a young couple emerged and joined them at the parapet. Gombarov's arm, partly lifted, dropped back to where it had been.

Once more their voices struggled on in inconsequent conversation; but in their hearts and minds deep streams of silence ran, bearing their unspoken feelings and thoughts. Now these streams had become rapids, and at last they beat down with a pressure as of high water falling upon stones. Outwardly their voices languidly rambled on:

"How beautiful!"

"Yes, beautiful!"

Then, some minutes later, their downgoing began, he leading, she following.

They exchanged a few remarks in tremulous voices; then were plunged into darkness and silence. Gombarov walked slowly, with fast beating heart, while his hot hands felt along the stone wall.

"John!" he heard his name called.

"Yes!"

"Are you there?"

"Yes, here is my hand."

She was two or three steps above him when their hands met. As he held her hand and felt it burning in his, he waited until she was on the same level with him. Then, at the very instant that his arm encircled her waist and tightened into an iron ring, he felt her bared arms clasp his neck, and her head fall on his breast. He drank in the delicious scent of her hair; then raised her head between his hands; their lips met and flowed together, hotly, like molten metals. And their impassioned limbs drew together, thigh to thigh, knee to knee, ankle

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to ankle; until they reeled as one person towards the wall of that dark blessed tower, whose medieval stones must before this have sheltered many lovers from the outer glare, would doubtless shelter more in time to come.

"If stones could speak——" But no, these stones would never speak; if they should give utterance at all, it would be to sing; out of that tower might issue a melody to overwhelm the earth. Of lovers dead and living, of love undying. Was it this that overcame them in that tower: a sense of exaction, perhaps, on the part of the imprisoned spirits of many lovers, who, having exacted in the past, would go on exacting their tribute from living lovers: ardent kisses, utter abandonment to passion, and deprivation of all shame? Shamelessly, in that tower, they clung to one another; shamelessly Winifred drew his head deeper and deeper down; shamelessly his lips seemed to be sinking deeper, deeper, into hers; with a shameless frenzy, that came of long hunger, he clutched at her with hungry hands; at her virgin breasts, which, small, firm and round, of a living silken texture, seemed, under his hands, to be filling with a warm suffusing wine, until his fingers flowed together with them in a delicious liquid warmth. His hands were drunken by contact with her; while she panted under the onslaught of their fused passions.

"I am so happy. . . ." she murmured.

"I love you, I love you. . . ." he went on reiterating.

"I hate clothes. . . ." she gasped at one moment.

"What a sweet nest for kisses!" said he, his hand in her bosom. He tried to touch her breasts with his lips, while she pressed his head closer to her.

Had the walls of the old dark tower closed round them, then and there, it would have been a sad but beautiful thing, a classic story, something to write a poem about. . . . Gom-



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barov was curiously conscious of this, even in the midst of his passion. It seemed to him that if he died then and there, he would not have cared. The spiritual sense appeared to be transcended together with the physical, was inseparable from it. The coals of love kindled with a two-coloured flame, and its fumes, as of some finely distilled incense, made his lightened head go round as in space, in ether.

But—and who doubts that our whole realistic life is founded, precisely, on this “But”?—it was at such a moment of intense living that they heard obtrusive voices and footsteps drawing slowly nearer from below. A feminine voice, with a New York twang, was saying:

“Can’t they afford electric lights?”

A patient masculine voice replied:

“My dear, you know they are a little behind the times on this side.”

“I shouldn’t call it exactly a little,” replied the woman. “And who’s going to pay you damages if you break your neck?”

“Break your neck, damn you!” whispered Gombarov. “I’ll pay the ten centimes.”

“Shh. . . .” whispered Winifred. “They might hear you.” And she put a hand over his mouth.

He filled the bowl of her hand with little staccato kisses.

“I say, Charlie,” went on the shrewish voice from below, “haven’t you brought your electric flash? I guess not! Just like you to forget to bring it the one time we need it.”

“How did I know that we were going to strike this hole?” said the man. “Wait a moment, and I’ll find a match.”

The pair paused on the stairs. The woman’s voice rambled on:

“What does the Baedeker say about this dark hole? Is

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this one of those places where one of them fine queens met her foolish lover, who later got a dose of lead for his pains? Has anyone ever been strangled here?"

"I shouldn't be surprised, Mabel," replied the man good-naturedly. "It's a lovely place for a murder, sure enough. But hang it, I can't find a match! I guess we'll have to do without it."

The pause gave Winifred an opportunity to put herself in order, and she and Gombarov began to exchange commonplace remarks, to let the intruders know of their presence. While the newcomers were brushing past him, Gombarov was thinking of the irony of intrusions: last night Welsh's snores; to-day this banal couple, who desired to violate the old tower with electric lights.

Once lost, the world of ecstasy in which they had lived those passionate moments was not to be regained, and so they went down, hand in hand, mute. Now the silence was of another kind; it was the silence after the worst of a cloud-burst, which had not wholly spent itself. The light dazzled them; stirred in them mingled feelings of joy and pain and shame, and their thoughts were as dissipating clouds, suffused with sunlight, spotted with black and gold, and mobile with patches of light and shade. For some time neither could speak, or even look at the other. The sense of shame, that came of a passion unconsummated, held them; but neither was, perhaps, aware of this, the true cause of their confusion; both had studied in the school of self-control, an admirable institution for folk of petty tempers and petty passions with little to control.

The days which followed on those aching months were for Gombarov as beautiful lyrics, spoilt now and then by bad lines. As a single bad line, or unsuited word in a poem can pull one up with an unpleasant jerk, so a single unworthy



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phrase, or unfitting word from the lips of his goddess could spoil the effect of all the beauty and tenderness she lavished on him. Unfortunate words had a way of sticking in his memory and of acting on his spirits and on the beauty she appeared to impart to him like a corrosive chemical, which disintegrated not only the gift but also him upon whom it was conferred.

There was that occasion at the *Café de la Paix*, when she expressed a comprehension of women who could maintain relations with five or six lovers. Again, there was the evening they spent at the Russian Ballet, when they went into an ecstasy over Nijinsky in the "Spectre of a Rose" and "Scheherazade," only to have the mood subjected to a cold douche upon Winifred seeing the gorgeously dressed women issuing out of the theatre after the performance and entering the sumptuous cars which waited for them. A few moments before she had been supremely happy, but now the three of them—her mother was with them—gloomily fought their way through the waiting crowd of opulent if flimsily dressed women, some of them gilt-shoed and gilt-stockinged, nearly all low-corsaged, revealing from under scarves rich patches of white skin; splendid shoulders were here and indiscreet breasts, and pleasant little valleys were visible between the breasts; fat, bejewelled dowagers and matrons were also here, in tight-fitting gowns, which outlined their unwieldy shapes and rounded promontories, producing the effect of bodies poured into the garments. White-shirted, monocled cavaliers, in shining top hats and broad black cloaks, accompanied the women, and followed them into the carriages, the doors of which were opened and shut by smart flunkeys in livery and business-like chauffeurs. One smelt money here; above all the overpowering odour of sex. One's glance caught this and

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that: a possessive man here; a possessed woman there; and the possessed was not less proud than the possessor. Whither, whither, rolled away that yellow, finely-rounded, palanquin-like motor carriage, into which a middle-aged, monocled satyr had conducted a red-stockinged, dark-haired, white-skinned girl, his many-ringed hand resting on her waist? "A satyr, if there ever was one!" thought Gombarov. "But a satyr must be rich nowadays, if he is to——"

He did not finish his thought, but with a sick heart watched the shadow that crept into Winifred's face. He was too well aware of the cause to ask her why it was there or to offer consolation. He was simply helpless.

"Damn!" broke from Winifred's lips.

"That's not nice of you, Winnie. . . ." began her mother.

"I don't care!" exclaimed Winifred. "It's all very well for you and John to talk. But I like fine dresses, a motor car to take me to a nice supper at some cabaret, then to a nicely furnished flat, where I can have my own maid to help me undress."

"The last is a service I should perform with great pleasure," thought Gombarov, bitterly, without humour. He said aloud: "How do you propose to get all this?"

"How? How do other women get these things? I suppose I can also sell myself to some millionaire. You think me pretty, don't you?"

"If John didn't know you," interrupted her mother, "he'd think I hadn't brought you up properly."

"Do you mean to say," asked Gombarov, "that you would be willing to live with that roué who was with the girl in the red stockings?"

"Why not?" retorted Winifred. "I thought him quite nice. And he'd give me everything."



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"Yes, and he would expect everything!"

"That's enough, children," exclaimed Mrs. Gwynne. "Let her alone, John. She's just upset. She doesn't mean anything she says."

"Yes, I do, mother!"

Gombarov felt far from reassured. It was not altogether Winifred's attitude that upset him. This, to be sure, was discouraging enough. But how was he to explain his own thoughts and feelings? He was no better than she. At all events, not in the mood he was in then. The after-theatre scene had infected him also. When he saw the roué enter the motor car with the exquisite creature in the red stockings, he was seized with bitter envy, and his heart burned with alternate sadness and fierceness; he had to confess to himself that at that moment he would not have minded at all changing places, provided the woman was Winifred.

That "provided" was important. So sorely had his love and constancy been tried that this appeared to be the one remaining thread that held him to the world of his integral self, woefully sinned against by that other world, into which circumstance threw him. Well, it was more than a thread. It was a rope, as strong and taut as a rope, upon which his integral self performed the arduous rôle of a rope walker. If he fell!—but he did not fall, not yet!

Nevertheless, there was undoubtedly the danger to which this integral self was exposed in the very act of balancing, by the diversion of its eyes to the alluring appeal of worldly life; of beautiful women, attired beautifully; of sensuous pleasures, to be enjoyed bountifully.

"Integral self!" These were his own words; but what, precisely, was this integral self? He defined it as that essential part of himself, which having lived the first ten formative

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years in the Russian woods, still clung by its roots there; that is to say, he was in his heart of hearts a simple natural being having simple natural desires: to have a roof over his head, a chance to pursue his chosen work, and a woman, which is every man's inalienable right.

On second thought, he was bound to admit a deep dissatisfaction with his definition, which did not quite explain those predilections of his for worldly things, especially for femininity wrapt in the seductive entanglements of lace and silk, necessitating unravelling, as of sacred mysteries. He had suffered too much, too recently, to see clearly; his draught of freedom had been short; he had not had time to adjust himself, to think out his case. All he knew was that he was at war with himself; that there was hardly a thought, a mood, an emotion, which was not contradicted by another. One day he had jotted down his case in the following wise in his Diary:

"KNOW THYSELF"

I am a Jew, a Russian, an American.

My race, my native soil and the country of my adoption strive in me for conciliation.

Strange: when I hear a famous mediæval synagogue-chant to words by Jehudah Halevi, I long inexplicably for Jerusalem. When I listen to the Volga folk song, I am a Russian, and wish myself back in Russia. When I read Walt Whitman and think of the future, I feel myself an American, and take a pride in it.

Yet God knows why all these years I have been aspiring to London, which I have not even seen. Is it love of the word? The universality of Shakespeare?

I like to think a man's thoughts of a home, wife and children; yet the audacious, the adventurous and thought of foreign lands I have not seen attract me equally. And why should the thought of living in tents, with a caravan, and, in intervals,



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this intense longing pursue me to ride a swift horse in the desert, dressed as an Arab?

Women attract me, both kinds: the chaste, chastely outlined women of Holbein; and the sinning, sinfully fleshly women of Felicien Rops. "A woman is either a prostitute or a mother," said a French writer. Oh, for a woman who is both in one!

There is a seductive sensual dignity in black and white, and flaunting oriental colours take one by storm; and there is pleasure in both.

How is one to reconcile the monk and roué in self? Is the roué merely a degenerate satyr, once noble, now chasing his nymph round a tree the leaves whereof must need be golden dollars? It is a problem to reconcile the satyr part of one's nature with an empty purse.

It is equally a problem to reconcile the desire to write books with the desire to live the life that makes books. When Rimbaud joined a caravan he stopped writing.

In the midst of passionate loving I stop to analyse, and analysing, I go on loving; which is a contradiction.

Are all these threads I, or is there one especial thread among them that is my true self? If the latter, how is it to be disentangled from the others? If the former, is it possible to take all these discordant threads and weave a single harmonious pattern from them?

I do not know myself.

Was he no more than a confused medley of conflicting emotions, a series of clashes as irreconcilable as fire and water? These antithetical elements, thus curiously set out in his confessional catalogue, by no means all: were these potentialities, emanations of his integral self, hitherto repressed, or were they no more than deep reflections of an outer world upon his sensitive lake-like surfaces, in which the reflections gained an intenser reality than the objects reflected? Or was he a kind of gramophonic disk, which, sensitized by suffering and experience, was capable of gathering onto itself and recording the voices of its proximity, voices harmonious or querulous,

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vulgar or full of refined nuance, as the case may be, now warring among themselves? Apart from these possibilities, was another: his intense, flaming curiosity about life, but he had no walls of thick skin to protect him from its dangers: flaming with his thousand desires, his whole being was burning, though he knew it not, sacredly; and, like Moses' bush, he was not consumed. There was torment in this, and much enduring, and he had not the consolation of the knowledge that came to him later, of the chemical processes of these fierce unending flames, disintegrating and refining, melting and fusing, finally reintegrating, conciliating all his conflicts and discords, bringing a measurable peace and moulding his face into a reasonably detached if undetachable mask, significant in its expression of acceptance of life and all its divine and diabolic adventure.

"'Know thyself'!—That is the hardest thing in life," was the further entry he had then made in his Diary, adding: "But one can only suspect oneself."

His suspicions concerning himself, based on certain fragmentary particulars of his knowledge, made him conjecture the causes of Winifred's discontent as quickly as his own. To offset his waverings, there was his oak-like staunchness, rooted, in spite of all temptations and discouragements, in his unreasonable love for Winifred. It was true that at Florence, before Winifred had come back to him, he had, in a moment of despair, departed from the path of chastity. He was sick at heart, because of his passionate longing for the love he had lost. A little Florentine courtesan, who turned out to be a Parisienne, had led him through the attractive winding streets, and within the sight of the Giotto Tower took him to a house kept by a German woman; where, in a bed manufactured at Lynn, Massachusetts, doubtless by Puritan hands,



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he surrendered, not without qualms, his virginal flame. He could speak neither French nor Italian; she neither English nor Russian; yet they found no difficulty in understanding one another. She simulated true love gracefully, was his long-lost Francesca; while he played the part of a make-believe Paolo, and departed, feeling a man for the first time in his unhappy life, so full of deprivation. Afterwards, he yearned more than ever for Winifred, and began to understand the danger of stirring banked-up fires. Only when Winifred had come back to him did he regret what he had done.

He was sorry for her when he saw her wanting the fine things she had seen on other women, and full of pity for her, and angry at his own helplessness. He resented those people; their presence served to remind him of a truth, by no means new to him; of money as a factor in happiness. If the noble satyr came to earth again, to live his life he would have to be a millionaire; and money degraded the satyr, deprived him of his nobility and made him a mere roué. Why, if he had their money, instead of going back to his lonely bed in that wretched hotel, he'd now be. . . . and it was terrible to think that money—bits of paper and gold—had this extraordinary power over men's lives, his life. He walked along between Winifred and her mother in a silent rage, and was several times on the point of saying that he would give her up, as he had not enough money to make her happy. But there was that other thought: that he could not live without her.

The next day, in quiet submission, she laid a hand on his arm, and said:

"Forgive me, dear. I was wicked last night to want those things. I want only you, you alone. Those things do not matter. We shall be happy without them, won't we?"

"It was I who was wicked," he replied. "There was

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a moment last night when I wished I were that roué with the monocle, and you the girl in that auto with me."

"But if you looked like that," she said, laughing, "I wouldn't love you." The last remark of his, however, stuck in her mind and led to the question:

"Have you ever been to another woman? . . . You know what I mean."

"No!" he replied, and wondered whether she had marked the slight tremor in his voice.

"When are you going to marry me?" she asked.

"As soon as I can earn enough to support you properly."

"When will that be, John? You are earning only a little by your articles. You are going to a strange city, where you will lead the precarious life of an author. I have no doubt that some day you will do big things. But by the time you can earn enough to support us both, we shall be old people, you and I. You are thirty—or is it thirty-one? And I am twenty-two. And things being as they are, I may be only a drag on you. . . . Perhaps, we had better part, after all. . . . I shall never love anyone but you. And I must go on with my art. I must do something to support mother. She has supported me long enough by journalism, which she hates."

This sort of thing paralyzed him. He might chuck it all, or he might plead. He wanted to do "the right thing," the strong thing. But he did not know whether to give it up or wholly surrender to love was the stronger. Impulses cut through, thoughts entangle. Experience alone can ultimately decide for natures possessing one and the other in equal measure.

Heart said to him: "Chuck it, young man. Go! Haven't you had enough of this? She has forsaken you once, and



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you are no longer sure of her, never will be sure of her.”

Mind said to him: “Stay, young man, plead with her. You are a nice lover, to give up at the least sign of weakening on the part of her you love. More than once you have been accused of being cautious. Throw all caution to the wind. Only in that way can you show that you are capable of love. She will see how you can love! You will conquer her by the greatness of your love. If you do not, you will, at all events, satisfy yourself. You will have no regrets at having left a stone unturned. Look at her! Is she not a nice thing to hold in one’s arms? A real prize, eh? Do you like the idea of anyone else holding her in his arms? Maddening, isn’t it, the mere thought of it?”

He no longer knew which was speaking, mind or heart. Mind and heart, each singing its song, had joined in a duet, and at last found a voice on his tongue.

“Winnie,” he pleaded, “you are not going to give me up now, after all these years, just as I am going to London, not knowing a soul there? Think of it! I shall be one of seven million there. I shall need you more than ever. The thought of you will give me strength to make my way. I have only you in this world, and if you forsake me, where shall I be?”

“You put a great responsibility on me!”

“That may be true. At the same time no man will ever love you as I have loved you. Can you afford to cast away great love? It never comes twice.”

“You want to tie me down.”

“But I tie myself down also. I don’t ask from you what I can’t give myself. If we will love each other only strongly enough, everything will come round all right. But if I am not sure of you, nor you of me, then we may as well part now, as you say.”

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The last sentence came from him almost involuntarily. He had not intended to say it; but there it was, it had come from him, a decisive word, implying a decision, forcing another.

"No, no!" exclaimed Winifred, putting a hand on his arm. "I cannot afford to let you go. Why do you let me talk like this? I have been wicked. Why do you let me be wicked? You have been very dear to me. . . ."

And they embraced one another in reconciliation. Matters went very well with them for days, during the rest of his stay in Paris. Nevertheless, the old feeling recurred at intervals: the feeling awakened by that memory of her having forsaken him once. He was not sure of her.

ON SPONGING FOR ART'S SAKE

Every new contact with his new life brought to Gombarov a sense of adventure; every new experience brought exhilaration; and he delved into the mysteries of the human minds he met on the journey, as other men delved into deep forests. In spite of the circumstances of his life, limiting his activities, he spent many happy days during that spring in Paris, snatched them from Life as one snatches who is unaccustomed to either freedom or happiness.

Luckily for him, his travelling companion, Welsh, withdrew his presence. Two days after his colloquy in the hotel bedroom with Welsh, he came in to find Welsh packing.

"If you don't mind," Welsh explained, "I'll be getting out. I have found an old pal from London. He has a studio here with a spare bed. I shall stay with him for a week, then we are going on to London, where we will take a studio together."

"Of course, I don't mind."

"Let's have an evening together—you and Rugger and me,"



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suggested Welsh, "and have dinner somewhere, if you are not otherwise engaged." He laid peculiar emphasis on the last phrase. He added: "Rugger is an awfully nice chap. I've told him about you, and he wants to meet you."

"Of course, with pleasure!"

The three of them met one evening at a restaurant.

Rugger appointed himself host and master of ceremonies. "I say," he addressed Welsh, whom he found useful as interpreter, "tell Frenchie that we want a real Yankee cocktail to start with; we'll have Russian caviare to follow; then some Italian *minestrone*; a bit of French sole after that; then a John Bull rump steak and chips; as for drinks, what would you chaps rather have: M \ddot{u} nich beer, Chianti or a Burgundy, or a white wine? And we can end up with a Scotch, a Strega or a Benedictine."

After they had decided on their international menu, they began to talk. Art, food, women, particularly Parisian women, were the usual topics discussed between gulps and munchings; and when they came to coffee and liqueurs, Rugger suddenly turned to Gombarov:

"So you are going to London?"

Gombarov nodded.

"For a holiday?"

"Oh no! To try my hand as an author."

Rugger whistled.

"Any income? You don't mind my asking?"

"Only what I can earn by journalism."

Again Rugger whistled.

"Any friends there?"

"No."

Once more Rugger whistled.

"Any introductions?"

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"No."

For the fourth time Rugger whistled.

"I suppose you left a good job behind you?"

"Yes, it was good for life."

"And how old are you now?"

"Thirty-one."

Rugger whistled for the fifth time.

"Why do you whistle?" asked Gombarov. "Surely, there's nothing astonishing in all that?"

"I am whistling, old man, because I can't sing," said Rugger in a friendly tone. "If I could, I'd sing a pæan of praise to you. Why, man, you've got the pluck of a war horse. I wouldn't do what you are doing, not for all the expectations in the world. If it weren't for the small allowance I get from home, I'd. . . . But tell me, what made you pick on London of all places? Why, man, London is——"

Welsh interrupted: "I don't see that it's any more remarkable than what I have done. After all, I've managed by my own efforts to pull through two years at Naples."

"Yes," retorted Rugger, "but you went to an appointment there at the Morgenstern school. In other words, you had a job waiting for you to fall into."

"But it didn't pay much," said Welsh, somewhat nettled.

"That may be true," went on Rugger, "but spaghetti is cheap. And, according to your own account you gave private lessons, in which your knowledge of the method helped you to get other things that man stands in need of." And Rugger winked significantly. He added: "And it cost you nothing!"

Gombarov caught the wink, and understood the implication. His face broadened into a smile.

"Oh that!" exclaimed Welsh. "I gave her some English lessons in exchange."



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Rugger and Gombarov burst into a guffaw.

"Yes, I've often heard," went on Rugger, when the laughter had subsided, "that sleeping with a book was the best way of learning a language, but I have been always under the impression that it was the other way 'round, that the man did the learning, that the book was constantly in need of renewing its expensive bindings, and that it was up to the man to pay for them."

"It's all very well for you to talk, Ruggy," said Welsh. "You have some sort of income, to start with. And though you may be short sometimes, yet you can go on working at your painting without worrying that tomorrow, or the day after, the chucker-out will come and throw your goods out into the street. How'd you like that? I am an artist, and I have not the means to go on with my art. I am a man, and I have not the means to get me a woman in the ordinary way. In the old days an artist had a patron; and once he had his patron, he had his art and his model, and as often as not a model served as a wife as well. The world owes the artist a living, and since nowadays it doesn't give it to him, he must take it where he can find it. He must live on his fellowmen, and he must use cunning to get himself a woman."

"On the whole, I am inclined to agree with you," said Rugger.

"Well, I am not," said Gombarov. "It seems to me that an artist and his life are one, and if he permits himself loose principles in his life, they will get into his art also."

"Art and life have nothing to do with one another, in spite of Tolstoy," exclaimed Welsh. "A man may ravish a woman, then go home and write a poem on the beauties of chastity."

"That is quite illogical!" argued Gombarov.

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"On the contrary," said Welsh, "nothing is more logical. An artist applies the whole of his logic to his art. Nothing after all, is more illogical than life, which doesn't give the artist a chance to carry on his art. Look at the 'nineties in England, and the number of artists killed by life, because they didn't have enough sense to live by their wits. Look at Villon, burglar and cut-throat, who wrote fine poetry. Well, I intend to keep going by any means, fair or foul. I don't intend to work in a factory, to keep someone else in luxury. I'd rather go tramping the country like Gorky's heroes than submit to a machine."

Gombarov was nonplussed. He had always believed that a man and his art were one; he still believed that; yet his sense of justice could not but admit that the facts upon which Welsh had based his philosophy of life were incontrovertible. This admission was disconcerting to his faith in his own moral integrity, as he realised that its possession was a doubtful asset to an artist having to struggle for mere existence. For the time being he lost pride in his possession, and a terrible fear arose in his soul as to his fitness to aspire towards authorship in a strange city, a place of peopled vastness, where one man more or one man less was of no matter. There was this new clash to reconcile in himself; there was the need to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable: the artist in the man, the man in the artist.

The responsibility he had assumed in going to London began to weigh upon him as he approached the city of his seven-year desire.

BETWEEN A SLEEP AND A SLEEP

After that strange dream, out of which seemed to come that flow of memories, Gombarov at last tired himself out thinking



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of the extraordinary episodes of his three months' journey. There was no disentangling the essential thread from among them. Instead, his thoughts went on ceaselessly rolling out as from a many-coloured skein and getting themselves hopelessly involved in a denser tangle of phantasmic images. With his growing tiredness, these became more and more blurred, and at last faded into nothingness. He was asleep. And he had another dream.

With him, as always, to dream was to wake in another world, a world not dissimilar from our own, yet essentially a world of alert penetrations, of concentric lightnings, which reveal starkly some islanded truth; while all else is plunged in a sea of darkness, obliterated from consciousness. Ever since Gombarov began his wanderings he had been subject to such dreams, curiously symbolic in character, and, if he did not go astray in his interpretations, hinting at some undefined, latent force in him, hitherto sleeping and now awakening. And, acting as with a mystic yet firm assurance, these dreams gave encouragement in his struggle, urged him on. They were, or were to become later, as Greek choruses, commenting on his life, impelling him to his destiny.

He dreamt he was walking on hot sands by the sea, in a lost, aimless way. It was an intensely arid, sunny day; and as he walked he remembered having earlier in his life lived through just such a day. There was nothing but the sand-dunes and the marshes and the sea, and there was no place to take shelter from the hot sun. He was alone, and his solitude was the intense solitude of dreams. And blinding as the sunlight was the hopelessness of his soul, and it shrivelled up in him all thoughts but one, all desires but one. That which he thought and desired must be done. That had been irrevocably decided; and he walked about as one already dead,

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yet seeking death. And suddenly, there appeared at his side, from he knew not where, a young man, an unhappy acquaintance of his youth, who years ago, had striven to be an artist, and been driven by circumstances to take his own life; and this man walked beside him as one already dead. Gombarov walked beside this man trustingly, for the man was aware of his desire and was there to help him consummate it. And quite suddenly, still walking on the arid sands, they came to an aqueduct of several arches, and each arch was smaller and lower than the other. Curiously enough, as one looked through the openings, no light came from them; either the arches were very deep, or else they were shut in at the other end. "Here is a good place," Gombarov's companion seemed to say, pointing to one of the smaller arches. "Just go in there, and wait. Once the sea starts coming in . . ." Even before the man could finish his sentence, the sandy beach had ceased to exist, and Gombarov was projected forward with the turbulent tide through the opening of the arch. He found himself swimming in a heavy, rough, black water, in a kind of twilight, under the arch, and his companion was at his side. "I am lost," thought Gombarov, swimming hard, though he had never swam in the sea before, and a great desire came upon him to live. Great black waves carried him on and on, and it was night, but the stone arch was no longer above his head. At some distance in front of him, a curious little pier jutted out, all lit up, a tiny island of light, which seemed to have no connection with anything on earth. Would he ever reach it? Stranger still, as he got nearer there appeared to be a lit-up office on the pier, and several young women were sitting on a double row of high chairs, as if working over figures. When he had scrambled up the pier and hands reached out to pull him up, he suddenly felt the absence of



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his companion. He stood up, firm on his feet, and realized that he was full of sea water. One of the two young women who had pulled him up attached a mechanical contrivance to his mouth, and presently the water came pouring out, forming a large pool on the plank floor. He turned a smiling face towards one of his savers, an attractive young woman, who, he observed for the first time, was dressed in a white bathing-suit edged with blue; she smiled at him, and, looking at the pool of water, said: "Well, I've never seen anyone take in so much water and live." Then everything turned to a red haze, and he woke with a start, the loud clamour of a bell ringing in his ears.

LON-N-N—DON-N-N-N—!

The church bell round the corner was ringing, and its tones, ascending and descending, poured themselves out with a measured reasonance, full of tuneful clamor, and fell in broad waves, half gay, half sombre, round Gombarov; prolonged dinning followed stroke on stroke of the male bell hammer, as his elated skirted spouse, responding to her consort's command, full-throated droned-moaned her doleful-joyful song, which sounded on Gombarov's ears:

*"Lon-n-n—don-n-n-n—! Lon-n-n—don-n-n-n—!
Lon-n-n—don-n-n-n—!"*

"Lon" on the up stroke, "don" on the down; a short dinning between, a long and deeper after.

All of a sudden, it dawned on the half awake Gombarov that that was the day on which he was starting for London.

Manfully came the triumphant, clamorous strokes of the bell and their frightening, wavering refrain:

*"Lon-n-n—don-n-n-n—! Lon-n-n—don-n-n-n—!
Lon-n-n—don-n-n-n—!"*

He was sensitive after his sleep, and the sounds touched

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him as if he were a sounding board. They impenetrated him from head to foot, insinuated themselves into his every nerve, and he reverberated with them. He was frightened at their song, which filled him, lifting him and letting him down. It acted upon him as a sudden and overwhelming *crescendo* of feeling after a prolonged *adagio*; he knew that on that evening he would consummate a seven-year-old desire. It was as if, while looking into a mirror, he had suddenly and unpremeditatedly caught a vision, as yet a shadow, of loveliness, peeping into the glass over his shoulders, a vision he had not seen before and was longing to see.

London, he was too well aware, had had her many lovers—artists and poets—and who was he, coming with empty hands, with no ready gift but the yearning of his love? But this yearning he was bringing from afar, unquestioning, without even having seen his love. All his knowledge of her was such as he had got from books, pictures and hearsay; above all, he was sharply aware that Shakespeare had trod her stones. If these things had whetted his appetite, he was even more strongly conscious of a deeper longing. He did not know whence it came, but it had nothing to do with explicable surface incentives. He only knew that he was being urged, driven, lashed on! But suddenly faced with the fact of being near the place of his desire, he was frightened at his own presumption, his audacity in attempting the quest.

“*Lon-n-n*——” dinned the bell again on the upward stroke. Gombarov’s heart rising with it, throbbed to its lingering tremolo, full of exultant notes.

“*don-n-n-n*——” came the downward stroke, with its ascending dinning; and down went Gombarov’s heart with it, with a faltering dying, until it reached its downmost depths of timorous resonance.



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The last echo of the bell died slowly away.

Gombarov looked at his watch. There were still two hours before the train started. He had packed his bag the evening before, but to control his excitement, he jumped briskly out of bed and began to dress. His movements were feverish, and he cut himself shaving. He went to an outdoor café and ordered coffee and rolls. He followed this with a liqueur brandy, and another, and another, to steady him. Then he walked up and down Winifred's street, past Winifred's house, wondering whether she was up, whether he might stop in and bid yet another farewell. Or was she asleep, her enchanting little head, its black hair loosened, buried in soft white bed clothes? Could he but get a glimpse of her thus! It was sad to go away, even to his beloved London, leaving her here. He restrained his desire to go in and see her, and strode energetically toward the hotel.

UNIVERSAL SPEECH OF HOTEL ATTENDANTS

The concierge waited for him with the hotel bill on an old silver platter.

Gombarov paid the bill and gave the man a generous tip, but the man appeared dissatisfied and grumbled in French. Gombarov understood the nature of the grumbles, if not their precise particulars; whereupon the attendant, by means of an open hand, described in the air a series of heights, as of organ stops; unmistakably indicating that he was a husband, had a buxom wife living—to judge by the series of curves he used in describing her frontal and rear rotundities—and was the father of five young ones. Gombarov retaliated by drawing a similar series of heights, going his protagonist three better.

The man threw up his hands in amazement.

"Oh! Mais vous etes qu'un jeune homme!"

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"No, no!" said Gombarov, and mustered a few French words:

"Pere . . . mere . . . freres . . . soeurs . . ."

"Ahl Je comprends!" laughed the man, sympathetically, and accepted two additional francs. And good-naturedly he seized Gombarov's bag, which he carried downstairs. He fetched a taxi, without again holding out his hand, and as he shut the taxi door, nodded a farewell full of comprehension.

UNIVERSAL SPEECH OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

At the Gare du Nord, Gombarov found himself installed in a carriage with a young German, who was reading Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The latter circumstance soon led to their entering into conversation and remaining companions until they reached London. The man spoke perfect English.

"No, I don't think there will be any war between the European countries; least of all, between Germany and England, who need each other, and are each other's best customer. That in spite of the fact that all countries are increasing their armaments. We'd all stand to lose, none to gain. Jean Bloch and Norman Angell have demonstrated that pretty clearly."

"But surely not all men of ideas are opposed to war," said Gombarov. "There is Nietzsche, who thinks only war can cleanse our civilisation. . . . And I am told that there are other lesser men in Germany who write quite frankly, advocating war."

"Nietzsche? *Der ist ein ideolog!*" replied Gombarov's vis-à-vis, breaking into German. "No one nowadays pays any attention to ideologists or ideas. Only realistic facts count."

"They seem to, but I am not sure that it is so," said



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Gombarov, and added, as a sudden idea struck him: "I should think it was the other way round. It is ideologists who never pay any attention to any one else. Rousseau and Voltaire inculcated the ideas of the French Revolution, and who knew at the time Karl Marx was writing that his idea would find so many followers?"

The German looked at Gombarov with a new interest, but said nothing.

The train was pulling into Victoria.

"You must look me up when you are settled, and we shall discuss the matter further," said the German. "Here is my card."

Gombarov casually glanced at it. It read:

MR. HUGO EBBING,

Private Secretary to James Hopper, M. P.

Mr. Ebbing observed Gombarov's astonished look. "Yes," he said, "I'm just from a holiday in the Black Forest, and I must be here, as in a day or two Parliament opens."

UNIVERSAL SPEECH OF LABOUR

"Where are you putting up?" asked Mr. Ebbing, when the train pulled in.

"I don't know yet," replied Gombarov. "I shall look for a place in Russell Square."

"Are you taking a 'bus or a taxi?"

Gombarov pondered for a moment. "A 'bus, I think," he said in a voice of indecision.

"Well, let me put you on the right one," said Mr. Ebbing.

Gombarov seized his heavy bag, and followed Mr. Ebbing.

Once outside the station, they found a workingmen's procession in progress. Numerous red banners were carried, bear-

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ing various inscriptions in large letters, such as: "We Want a Living Wage," "Solidarity of Labour," "Workers of All Lands, Unite!"

Gombarov looked in amazement at the strange procession of stragglers, with hard-worked, furrowed faces and large, blackened hands; some of them wore no collar, only a kerchief round their neck; a few had neither collar nor kerchief, and showed patches of swarthy, hairy skin. There were women in the procession, for the most part shabbily dressed; all looked grim, and none was smiling; even the young showed symptoms of fatigue and age. They marched silently, the evening sun accentuating the grimness of their faces; and the crowd that watched them was also strangely silent.

Several things astonished Gombarov: the silence, the presence of the red flag, the fatigued, almost apathetic look of the marching workmen, the apathy of the onlooking crowd, all impossible in the land he had lately come from. The whole scene assumed an intenser strangeness owing to the fact that it was plunged in the fantastic atmosphere of evening daylight. It was eight o'clock of a June evening.

"They are either striking or protesting," explained Mr. Ebbing.

Just then a little group which brought up the rear began to sing.

"What are they singing?" asked Gombarov, intensely interested. He might have been Dante asking a question of his illustrious guide in the Inferno.

"Don't you know?" asked Mr. Ebbing in astonishment. "It's the *International!*"





BOOK II

**PUBLICANS, SINNERS, SAINTS, ARTISTS,
PHILOSOPHERS, OUTCASTS**

To Edward J. O'Brien



CHAP. II: VARIATIONS ON A SINGLE THEME

*"Reflection is itself a turn, and the
top turn, given to life."*

—SANTAYANA.

JOY ON A 'BUS

ASSISTED to his 'bus by Mr. Ebbing, Gombarov, weighed down by his bag, struggled up the narrow steps to the top and took the rear seat. He asked the conductor to let him down at Tottenham Court Road, the nearest point for Russell Square; then wholly gave himself up to the sensation of seeing and absorbing London.

The great city was at its best in that fantastic evening daylight of June. To him who had not seen it before, this light was peculiar; it was neither of day nor of night, neither twilight nor dawn; it was the light of another sphere, where spirits hold revels and dreams are born. So it appeared to Gombarov, delicately attuned after seven years of enduring and waiting, and thrice seven of toiling and suffering in a land of violent contrasts, to receive the full charity of this light, which played upon his nerves and caused his flesh to vibrate with quiet ecstasy, a strange low music filling him to the tips of his fingers with red resonance as of blood and wine. He had not yet seen the face of London, but only the radiance of the face. Fear and misgiving left him for the time being; he had no doubt that his bride was Dulcinea.

In that light the street lights were of a silvery dimness as of early stars, while the buildings in Victoria Street stretched



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on in long lightless masses, cliff-like and precipitate, densely dark, fading into purple and grey. And looking right and left, to lose nothing, he caught sight of a cleft, and through the cleft a tall tower, formidable and perpendicular, like a colossal, lightless lighthouse, aspiring to violate England's curiously low skies. That was a strange thing he had had time to note about the English skies; they appeared to be so much lower than the American skies.

Having left Westminster Cathedral behind, the red 'bus almost noiselessly glided on, darting in and out of the crowded traffic, cunningly brushing past other red 'buses, with a gondola-like grace which was incredible; at times no more than a hair's breadth separated them. And there were no sudden, sharp, shrieking noises of taxi-horns and overhead trains as in New York; but there was a trembling and a rumbling in the air, steady and constant, the even breathing of modern life over vast spaces. All the noises were swallowed up and became as one noise, vibrant like that of a ship's turbine, incessantly throbbing, reduced to normal pulsation, diffuse mellowness of a tone painting, in which conflicting colours take their place without quarrelling with one another, and none shrieking. This, Gombarov had time to observe before reaching the end of his journey, had its counterpart in the physical contours of the streets, which were curiously free from sharp abutting angles so characteristic of the streets of the New World. This rounding of the edges at street crossings enabled wheeled traffic to turn a corner without pulling up or breaking the steady continuity of its flow. And only the upraised hand of a traffic policeman caused everything to stop and to gather at a single point as at the sudden shutting down of a canal lock. As he watched, with fascination, the upraised hand of the immov-

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able figure, a kind of symbol, *reductio ad absurdum*, of law and order, Gombarov thought:

"It must have taken centuries of civilisation to have evolved this extraordinary power for an upraised hand, just as it must have taken centuries to have rounded off the corners of London's streets."

The growing, collected traffic, consisting of taxis, motor buses and drays, paused before the lone figure with upraised hand, and throbbed and snorted like a single restless steed from the kingdom of Brobdingnag. Then, after some moments, the figure dropped its arm with an automatic swoop, as if the arm were a railway signal; and the pent-up traffic moved sluggishly on.

Gombarov cast a lingering glance at the Abbey, at the Parliament buildings, at the vista of lights stretching across Westminster Bridge, and knew that he was now traversing grey Whitehall, the nerve centre of the British Empire. The bus ran on in the broad avenue, speedily and without pause. He had but time to note the squat solidity of the buildings and the even continuity of their skyline, so different from New York's anarchic silhouettes at twilight; above all, there was the overwhelming impression of stony greyness, as if the buildings had been plunged into some powerful grey solution and now radiated greyness, an effect which conferred on the architecture a sense of unity. And these buildings surely radiated power also. Gombarov knew that these ramparts of grey stone, familiar to him through pictures, imprisoned an energy, whose cerebral effulgence, emanating from constantly renewed English skulls, ruled the destinies of perhaps half the human race—of Ireland, India, Rhodesia, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Egypt; and he could not help but reflect that there must have been just such a street, such a series of buildings,



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in ancient Rome, with an equally immense cellular Foreign Office, and with separate Colonial Offices for the regions of Spain, Gaul, Pannonia, Asia Minor, and even barbarian Britain. Wholly vanished was that street of the City of Seven Hills, and out of the city's ashes rose the bird Phoenix, which, having encompassed several deaths and resurrections, alighted on the Thames, whose virgin waters then conceived an abundance of life, such as had been once that of the Euphrates, of the Nile and of the Tiber, bereaved rivers now flowing with sacred dead water. And out of the living womb of the new chosen there came forth men on ships to conquer the earth, to establish their speech and new universal laws, and to proclaim London the new and more glorious Babel; for men have always loved Babel, and their aspiration has ever been towards Babel, and their existence has been a continuous pendulating between Babel and Babel.

Gombarov had little interest in politics, but in the presence of these Whitehall walls and monuments, as if overcome by their imperative atmosphere, he found himself suddenly possessed with a curiously burning sense of history; possibly, the cumulative memories of his race, which had experienced and had witnessed other nations experience numerous vicissitudes, now evoked in him a responsive chord to an atmosphere so essentially historic and peopled with historic ghosts; whereupon he gave way to his habit of introspection and meditated upon whether a young stranger entering Rome in the heyday of her glory had not experienced sensations like his own on his entry into London.

And now here was Trafalgar Square, the Nelson column looming to overshadow the memory of the Titus Arch, as Life overshadows Death, as the Present overshadows the Past, and, trembling, awaits the coming of the Future, before whose



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corrosive, on-creeping shadow that which has been and that which is shall ultimately and inevitably crumble into dust, and, crumbling, lie flat as a grave, upon whose dust living men shall erect tall monuments and ponderous arches to perpetuate the memory of the life that was. There was some hint of intimacy about the figure at the top of the column, as living men had heard their fathers tell of him, having seen him in the flesh, of his god-like courage and of his human frailty, of his braving such wilful elements as rage in men-gods and nature, of his love for a woman, and of his love for men, and of his dying cry, which as by some all too earthly magic, in three simple words, had touched, and would continue to touch for generations to come, the hearts of his countrymen: "Kiss me, Hardy!"

Even Gombarov, not an Englishman, felt the impelling spell of the place the instant he first beheld it, and, while the bus paused, with each succeeding instant grew increasingly ecstatic at the sight, in that mystic twilight, of the noble square with its man-crowned tall column, its broad façade, its background of drowsing buildings, the low-domed National Gallery and the high-spired St. Martin-in-the-Fields, over which hovered, even as that caressing light, the genius of Christopher Wren. Nelson and Wren! It was fitting that the twin spirits of two such men, one a hero, the other an artist, should abide here and permeate the place, since, it seemed to him, that the divine attributes of courage and beauty alone make life worth living, give a meaning to life, inspire emulation, and cause men's souls to gravitate towards God, in whose image they have been created, whose image they have so often betrayed. There was one thing he could not understand: that was the almost uncanny familiarity of the place. It was as if he had been here before, as if some dimly remembered dream had become a



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clear reality, as if an Englishman's soul had crept into his skin and utterly possessed him, or possibly, re-possessed him, after a lapse, from some previous existence, and had now re-awakened on English soil, at the sight of a typically English, quintessentially English scene. He had never thought much about the matter, had hitherto regarded the reincarnation theory as a superstition, and there was no explaining this strangely unaccountable feeling as of "coming home."

Even at the height of his drunken ecstasy, all at once there obtruded upon his vision the suddenly lit up ball of the Coliseum, and, simultaneously, up sprang the lights giving names to the "stars." "Let there be light!" and "Let there be stars!" Here was a new interpretation, and Gombarov saw that it was not good. Was it not what he had run away from? And here was the barbarian at the old door, with a new bag of tricks and magic press-buttons to beguile the old soul away in exchange for a new one.

The soul of old England was left behind in Trafalgar Square; the 'bus rolled on through one of the corridors of the new England. Up Charing Cross Road, past a cinema house, announcing "The Grim Avenger: A Thrilling Romance of Three Continents"; past the Hippodrome, blazing with lights; past the buildings of new flats, utterly banal but for the curve of the old street; past a music hall, flaunting across its front the pirouetting figure of a Russian toe-dancer on a coloured screen, while underneath, flashing for the world to see, letters of bright light proclaiming other attractions: a Cockney Comedian, a Spanish Tango Turn, a Swedish Acrobat Troupe, American Clog Dancers, an Argentine "Stunt" Artist, Naughty Fifi the French Comic Chanseuse and Mimi her Eccentric Accompanist, and so on, and so on.

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"How amazingly international!" mused Gombarov, and laughed to himself, as the after-thought struck him: "And here am I, a Russo-American Jew, looking on!"

Was this chaos, or unity? It was chaos, and had a unity after a fashion. It was the unity of a many-tuned medley, each tune of which maintained its entity, losing it only at the moment of embracing another tune; at best, it was the unity of ultra-modern music, shaped out of discords, beaten but not molten into a harmony.

One thing struck him as being extraordinary: that at a time that articles of utility and commerce were being standardised there should be a growing anarchy, a steady effort towards individualisation, in the fine and the vulgar arts. This, the pirouetting figure reminded him, was especially true of the popular art of dancing. Not only was the dancing mania growing and developing in diversity, but there were actually dances in which all the participating couples were encouraged to take individual steps different from those of the other couples. A no mean measure of sensuality was introduced into these dances, which equally departed from all standard moralities, though the dancers were, for the most part, from respectable classes, and lived content in their otherwise standardised lives. Stranger still, thought Gombarov, this mania of nimble wantonness had come hither from two opposite directions, from two countries as diverse as Russia and America, their one point of contact. To be sure, he had not got all this knowledge from his short 'bus ride, but had had ample facilities for acquiring stray and curious information at the *New World*, where, for years, it had been among his duties to follow events in the London periodical press, with the object of concocting a weekly London letter, an object



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attained by the use of scissors and paste and not a little ingenuity.

In front of the pirouetting figure, Gombarov, sitting on the traffic-arrested 'bus, would have allowed his mind, now galloping and out of hand, to pursue its passionate meditations on the subject of nimble-legged, short-skirted phenomena, matters of curve and line, concerning which, regarding himself a connoisseur, he judged with pagan-eyed detachment, coolly yet passionately. The 'bus, however, extricating itself from the taxis, resumed its journey, and hardly more than a minute elapsed before the conductor popped his head above the steps and shouted:

"Next stop, Tottenham Court Road, sir!"

JOY ON FOOT

The 'bus crossed an uncommonly straight, crowded street, and stopped. Gombarov slowly descended with his bag and while the crowd swarmed round him, paused to get his bearings. He was somewhat dazed after his exciting twenty-minute journey and his first sight of London. It had been altogether an exciting day, beginning with his strange dream in Paris and his awakening. Automatically, he pulled out a packet of "Maryland" cigarettes, and lit one, and between abstracted puffs watched people go by. No one paid the slightest attention to him, in spite of his wide-brimmed felt hat, his artist's black wing tie and his wistful, energetic face, rich with a dark pallour, coppery in tone, in spite, too, of his deep, well-set eyes, grey-blue under the sharp-defined black spans of the brows, which arched from the long, straight pillar of the nose, and on either side met a stray tuft of his longish hair, against whose black the eyes appeared of an intense and lustrous blue. It was different in America, or even in Paris, where, it did

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not escape his notice, he had served as an object of observation even among ordinary people. He had not yet had time to learn that Paris was, in comparison, a walled town, that its social instincts were those of a walled town, and that in spite of its reputation as a refuge for artists and eccentrics, uncommon appearances excited far greater interest than similar appearances in London, a place as impersonal as the sea, taking no notice of its driftwood, whether mahogany or plain spruce.

He soon saw a policeman standing in the very centre of the open space where five streets converged, and once more gathering up his bag, as well as his courage, approached him. The mild-mannered bobby gave him his directions for Russell Square with a courtesy so overwhelming and a precision so meticulous that Gombarov, remembering the rude condescension of New York's law guardians, thought for a moment that he had entered Alice's Wonderland. A moment later he was conscious of having forgotten to thank the polite bobby, and in great chagrin he paused on the kerb, uncertain whether he ought not to go back; and even while he paused his eyes, glancing upward, fell on the most extraordinary sculptures he had ever seen, which quite banished the policeman from his mind. He saw four male figures ranged along a ledge over shop windows. Heroic in size, they were heroic in nothing else; their backs to the wall of the house caryatid-wise, they held up nothing but the empty air; without any pretensions whatsoever of bodily perfection, of abstract or ideal beauty, they were yet lacking in modesty; they wore neither fig-leaves nor goat-skins, neither Greek draperies nor Roman togas, nor any outer garment ever represented in the arts, yet they were not naked, but boldly stood up, for all the world to see, in suits of up-to-date underwear, comfortably fitting in spite of the formidable paunches exhibited by two of the figures. Here



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was bedroom realism for you, thought Gombarov, as his slow-thinking brain grasped the fact that these masterpieces of banality had been erected to glorify the heroic endurance of the "You-can't-tear-'em Union Suits."

"Them's made to last as long as the British Hempire lasts," said a cockney wit to Gombarov, having observed the latter's preoccupation, and added before he passed on: "All you want to complete the set is a couple of fat girls in combinations, eh?"

Gombarov laughed at the ludicrous vision evoked by the ribald cockney, and suddenly awakened to the fact that he was in Shakespeare's country and that in spite of the Puritans, the native wit of the people had not wholly run dry. Surely, no "intellectual" could have offered so trenchant a criticism. At all events, the cockney's words broke the child-like spell that held him before these extraordinary works of art attired in the "You-can't-tear-'em underwear"; and pulling himself together, he threaded his way through the crowd towards Great Russell Street.

After Tottenham Court Road, this street seemed pervaded by an intense quiet. As his bag was growing heavy he often paused to rest, and while resting he went on observing. Nothing, however trivial, escaped him. It was impossible not to notice the huge building of the Young Men's Christian Association, whose presence in a Christian country was hardly to be deemed as strange as that of the shop across the street, where Buddhas and heathen gods of all nations could be bought in assorted sizes and at varying prices by chance alien worshippers and antique collectors, the latter a class accustomed to handle and to buy strange images and idols and finely wrought gem-encrusted crucifixes with equal irreverence, for their esthetic or material value rather than for their being the spiritual emanation of some artist drunken with the Divine

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Essence. Gombarov walked on, getting his fill on the way of Japanese and Persian prints, of Chinese ivories and dragoned screens, of Indian chessmen, of all manner of lacquer wares, of Malay Archipelago boat oars, of Maoriland spears, of Javanese marionettes, of American Indian tomahawks, wampum and moccasins, of an endless variety of gew-gaws, some of them minute enough to have come from Lilliput. He had about made up his mind to succumb to no further temptations, when there hove in sight, seemingly endlessly stretching, a series of tall iron railings, and as he approached nearer, there became visible, considerably receding, an immense Greek building, nobly colonnaded, distinguished shadows falling from the tall formidable columns and filling the portico with godly mystery, vibrant in portentous twilight. The last daylight hovered with a bright dying lustre, then perceptibly darkened, like a woman's white body sleepily turning on its side and pulling over itself a diaphanous coverlet of purple. Gombarov stood for some time watching the beautiful building as it softened under the caresses of the steadily deepening purple, and mentally dissociating it from the relative meanness of its surroundings imagined it as a living temple, lonely on a hill, dedicated to worship.

No dark-skinned Greek in white draperies stood at the stone gates, but only a blue-uniformed commissioner conversing with a policeman. Gombarov had no need to ask what the building was, for from photographs and engravings, he knew it to be the British Museum, the greatest yet of all repositories, nay, of mausoleums, dedicated to the preservation of fragments, and fragments of fragments, of extinct, and nearly extinct, civilisations; and it was wonderful to think that there was



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hardly a known historic, or even prehistoric, event, but there was some record of it here in stone or papyrus; that hardly a nation, race or tribe, but was represented by some intimate expression of its soul, congealed in stone, the works of its nameless Phidiases; that hardly an emotion of beauty, born of the marriage of the mind and the senses, but was present here in some image or form of itself; endless transient moments, each containing all eternity and preserved for eternity. Simple weapons of war, too, with which human beings fought one another before the apostles of Progress had devised the machine-gun and the submarine, weapons ultimately surrendered to Death, the last victor; it was, indeed, as if the ancient antagonisms were reconciled here, in this huge repository, a kind of Babel of the Dead, placed by curious irony, perhaps by divine design, in the very midst of the Babel of the Living.

Gombarov turned from this solemn thought and again imagined the building as a living temple on a lone hill, when suddenly strange sounds broke in upon his abstraction.

JOY OF BAGPIPES

He had heard those sounds before, but never had they sounded so strange. He looked in the direction from which they came and saw a sturdy, bare-kneed figure in Scotch kilts and tunic of plaid and tam-o'-shanter strutting up and down the street, along the line of the kerb, blowing with puffed-out cheeks into that strange puffed-out device, the Scotch bagpipes.

With a copious clamour strange, wild, uncanny sounds burst from the pent-up bag, as if a thousand small captive birds from Scotland's hills were inside the bag, by some magic made to sing one tune, the piper's own, to his charming and willing.

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THE BAGPIPES

*A bagful, a bagful of birds,
Birds, birds, birds,
Singing, chirping,
Warbling, twittering,
Trilling, caroling,
Fiercely fluttering
In a tuneful capering,
Whimpering, clamouring,
For flight at dawning,
For delight of morning,
For at eve to hover
Over lassie and lover,
For at night to rest
With mate in soft nest,
At noon by Sun to be kiss't,
A tune to sing to the mist,
O kind MacPherson,
Blind piper's son,
Let us out, out, out!
We are crying,
We are dying,
For hills!
For far, far hills,
For green dells and rills,
For bluebells and heather,
Where birds may gather,
And sing together,
In highland and lowland,
The green land of Scotland,
Forever, forever, forever!*



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This was the curious fashion in which he later recorded the bagpipes episode in his Diary, and to these simple rhymes he added in prose:

"I could not help reflecting that there was a curious, if indefinable, kinship between the simple grandeur of that Greek building and those weird pipes; and something in me responded to both. Can it be that my having been born and bred in the Russian woods has something to do with this response? For, surely, both things are of nature: the simple building with its strong, erect columns like trees, which cast shadows as trees cast shadows in a forest, among which the strangely bird-like music of the bagpipes finds natural, even inevitable echoes. Both are of nature, as much as the Egyptian pyramid is of nature, having been created in the image of a mountain to secure the sense of permanence that is of a mountain, for towards permanence man has always aspired, towards some perpetuation of himself in flesh, stone, words, music, some shape or art form. But there is nothing in common between the Museum and the mean little houses by which it is surrounded, and there is nothing in common between the piper and the little pot-bellied man who, joining me at the kerb, observed: 'Why don't they stop that terrible noise? They ought to have a law against undesirable noises. I'd sooner hear a rag on a mouth organ!' I said nothing, but fingering a malicious six-pence, so that the man could not help seeing it, dropped it into the piper's hat."

JOY OF OBSESSION

The piper walked away. Gombarov would have absurdly followed the piper, but there was his own unmusical bag of thick leather, brass-bound at the corners, containing clothes

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and books, altogether heavier than any big bagful of birds' tunes; it was not the sort of thing to lug about with one on his first night in a strange city, and a lodging yet to be found.

"Please tell me the way to Russell Square," he asked the first man he met, as he proceeded on his way.

The man did not appear to understand and glanced at him blankly.

"Russell Square," repeated Gombarov.

The man maintained his dumb if friendly look, but on Gombarov repeating "Russell Square" for the third time, a gleam of intelligence, even joy, leapt into his eyes, as in a foreign voice, full of eager gladness, his hands gesticulating, he exclaimed:

"Ah-h, ze Rossaille Squaire! Take ze left road, *alors* ze right road. *Cinq minutes!*" and he lifted up five fingers.

"*Merci!*" said Gombarov, and wondered as he continued his journey whether if he had landed here in 1612 instead of 1912 he would have had a Frenchman show him the way, and to his own question he replied: "No, nor a Russian, nor a Bohemian, nor an Italian, but doubtless some roystering Englishman, who would have looked me up and down as at some strange animal."

He found Russell Square and stopped to look at the imposing looking hotels situated there. A New York hotel of the appearance these hotels presented would be expensive, and the elaborately uniformed commissionaires who stood haughtily at the entrances gave a further forbidding touch. "There must be cheaper hotels hereabouts," he thought, and trailed in the direction of Woburn Place. Inquiries at four different houses, which had signs up, "Bed and Breakfast, 3/6," elicited the



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reply that they were "full up"; at the fifth he found a room. Asked to register his name, he curiously ran his eyes down the page, and the result gratified him beyond all expectation:

J. S. Mallik, Calcutta.
A. Goldstein, Kieff.
David Williams, Llandudno.
Patrick O'Flaherty, Dublin.
Thomas Ayres Watt, Chicago.
Jules L'Estrange, Marseilles.
Giuseppi Crescenzo, Genoa.

And so on, and so on.

"You don't appear to have many Englishmen here," observed Gombarov to draw out the lodging house keeper.

"No," replied the latter, a Scotsman. "We had one last week, and he left next day for Africa, to hunt lions, he said. He didn't like the looks of London, said there were too many tame foreigners about." The Scotsman grinned. "Gladys, show the gentleman up to Number Nine," said he to a fair buxom girl who had come into the room, in response to his ring. "You'll find everything there in order, sir."

He had seen that room before. It was the same as everywhere, except that the reproductions consisted chiefly of supplements to Christmas pictorials and of portraits of English royalty. The inscription over the bed, "God Rest Me!" at once aroused his suspicions of the bed, which, however, on examination, proved unfounded.

Then followed the joy of washing his face after a strenuous day, the joy of feeling cool water on his perspiring skin. But he was still too excited to rest, so putting on a fresh collar he walked out again, carefully following the original direction;

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and there was the added joy of being quite free of his bag. There are so many joys in this world that it would be folly to count them all.

JOY IN A CUP OF TEA

He was now back in Tottenham Court Road. After walking up and down the street for a while, he entered an eating house, and fell into a once red, now colourless plush seat against the wall, ordered tea and bread and butter, then gave himself up to a study of the room. Dingy, tired electric lights hung down from the ceiling and revealed a dingy, tired room, full of dingy, tired properties. There was a weary, rusty look, reminiscent of a second-hand shop, about the steaming perpendicular urns on the counter, where also reposed apathetic sandwiches, which were now and then conveyed by apathetic waitresses to apathetic patrons. So it appeared to him after America. He especially observed a young man and a girl in one of the corner seats. The girl had an arm round the young man's neck; one of his hands rested across her knees; and thus they sat, immovable, a long, incredibly long time. They might have been figures at Madame Tussaud's. The light so fell that it lighted up their stationary smiles; and thus, quietly, they smiled for a long, incredibly long time. The remains of their fish supper lay on the table in front of them; he observed that most of the patrons had ordered fish, which, fried and dried and all curled up, had the appearance of a stage property, such as he had seen employed with devastating effect in American burlesque sketches, together with its friendly rival, the syphon bottle.

The tea he drank was strong and black, but the pleasure he experienced in being at last in London bewitched him, and far from disliking it, he went on sipping it as if it were nectar



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in the bowl of Dulcinea's palm. And suddenly, he felt an infusion of blitheness and strength; his legs felt hard and firm, his belly taut and as of brass, his coat full of shoulders. To such an extent did his mind, at that moment, exert its will over his body. He felt the joy of precarious freedom. And he went on drinking nectar out of the bowl of Dulcinea's hand. Then, suddenly, as yet slightly, his inner wings flapped, wings whose existence he had hitherto hardly been aware of, wings pinioned by the cruel uncouth hands of that man-created monster, mechanical Caliban, who, by an evolved cunning, had at last overpowered man, his master, and made him his servant, and had caged Ariel in man's breast to intensify his torment and discontent. He gnashed his teeth at the thought of his many misspent years at the factory and in factory-made society, and braced by this damning thought his inner wings flapped again, now more vigorously. Such was the effect of being at freedom in a strange city, yet a city in some way unaccountably familiar to him. And he went on drinking that black, bitter tea as if it were some anodyne, nectar out of the bowl of Dulcinea's hand.

JOY OF WINDING STREETS

He paced the streets, and turned into a winding lane, which, like some lives, was a short but merry one. A curio shop, before whose window stood a few gaping passers-by; the stage-door of a music-hall, before which loitered some idle Johnnies waiting for their sweeties to come forth; the back of a popular restaurant, from whose open windows issued the strenuous melody of an American "rag", played, judging from the shadowy silhouettes visible against the lower opaque panes, by an active orchestra of three; these were some of the features of the little street, whose deviations of house and kerb line

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struck him as quaint and lured him irresistibly on. Then it took a sudden curve towards the main street, and at the apex of this curve he found an even tinier lane seductively diverging in the opposite direction and disappearing in an attractive, unpremeditated curve between two rows of petty houses, lit up quaintly at the curve's vanishing point by a lone street lamp, whose slight flicker caused the faint light and fainter shadows to move back and forward, like a caressing hand, across the houses and pavement. There was in this arrangement of curves and divergences a sense as natural as a meeting of streams. Who knew if it did not owe its origin to precisely such a confluence of waters, over whose drained beds the road-makers had built these meandering city lanes? Whatever the cause, there was in this composition a perfection the greater for its artlessness. The lamp-post itself stood as a mystic symbol at the convergence of these curves, and the dim flare that crowned it cast a circle of frail light of diffuse softness, obliterating all sense of local colour and enduing the spot with an aspect timeless and placeless, rich with penumbral mystery, as if, altogether, it were a stage design devised by a master dramatist for the enactment of eternal moments. Deserted, it yet appeared to vibrate with an intense life, ready for the entrance of dark, indeterminate figures, draped classically or in modern apparel, but unchanged and changeless in gesture, in the manner of a whisper, and in alternate moods of love, conspiracy, ambition, and murder. Here was nothing, and here was everything. Rembrandt would have made a miracle of it. Gombarov stood there a long time, bewitched by the simple magic of the spot, and renewed his regret for not having followed his bent for painting.

In the course of his stroll Gombarov found more than one



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such exiled corner, crowded by a clamorous new world; more than one such winding lane running into another, curve intersecting curve; and he thought of those endless streets of the city he had come from, thoroughfares whose length, rectitude and dullness had doubtless been designed to do tribute to Virtue, that methodical, prudish goddess who disdained the seductive roundnesses of the female. And, as he recalled those streets, he understood the violence they had done to his nature. "No, no!" he thought, "not alone my nature, but nature generally. Nature thinks in terms of streams, not of canals. These old bits were built up slowly, naturally; they were not planned, they just grew; there is a sense of leisure in this.

But speed makes for straightness, straightness makes for speed. And you want to go speedily through a straight street, as it is boring and without mystery. A place of long, straight streets must, therefore, influence the character of the inhabitants. It must influence all of life. I should say the modern brain is no longer impressed with convolutions, but with rectangles. That, perhaps, accounts for much of modern art, the art of Douglass."

Thus Gombarov went on thinking, and he realized more and more the adventure and significance of trivial things, the fact of trivial things having a meaning hardly less profound than important, world-stirring events; for all things answered to the same laws, and all laws were equally at the root of big and little things. The known universe was but a small thing lost in the immensity of space, and a whole universe throbbed on his thumbnail, in the bowl of a buttercup or on a butterfly's wing.

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A JOY REFUSED

"Are you lonely, darling?"

The question was flung at him by a girl who suddenly stepped out of the recess of a doorway. As yet he saw under the broad brim of her hat a mere whiteness, the haunting semblance of a smile, rouged lips parted and two rows of white teeth, and the liquid glitter of two points, fixing him from under the shadows.

The suddenness with which the question was flung at him out of the darkness of the doorway, and the immediate emergence of the girl, startled him, acted upon his thoughts like the precipitate falling of a stone into very clear water, which grew muddled and rippled, spreading into a series of broadening circles, each flaunting in increasingly widening letters the importunate question, "Are you lonely, darling?"

He made no reply, and the girl, presuming on his hesitation, walked on at his side, without asking his leave. He looked at her, and was about to speak, when she, recognising a foreigner in him and wrongly suspecting the cause of his hesitation, forestalled him in a reassuring voice:

"Oh, no! I'm not English, boy, if that's what you are thinking. I'm real alive, direct from Sydney, Australia, the Paris of the Southern world. And my mother was French. The English girls are no good. You don't want a corpse, do you?"

"I am sorry. I don't want anyone!"

"I'll show you a good time," went on the girl, coaxingly. She laughed and blew fumes of wine in his face. "I am the joy of all nations, that's what I am! I can please a Frenchie, an Espagnole, or an I-talian. That's honest, boy. Testimonials? Come home with me and I'll show you enough



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to snow you under. Love letters by the score. Photographs too! The wall is covered with them. Frenchies, Hindus, Dagoes, Jew boys, Yanks, Swedes, Rooshians, Japs, Chinks! Some of them wanted to marry me, too! But I am not the marrying kind. No, not me. I love no one man. I love them all! I don't care where they come from. They are all darlings to me, except when they are rotters. Now, I don't mind a bounder, but I draw the line at a rotter . . ."

She went on volubly punctuating her sentences with good-natured laughs. Suddenly she asked:

"And what may you be? One can see you ain't English. But you may be a Yank, judging by the cut of your clothes," and she teasingly felt the padding of his shoulders. "Yanks are never as big as they look."

"I? I come from the moon. Just dropped down!"

"Oh, one can see you are moony," laughed the girl. "That don't make any difference to me. Come along with me, and I'll make you forget your faraway country."

"But I have a girl there!" he laughed.

"Ha! ha! ha! That's a good one! A girl in the moon! You are moonier than I thought. I can make you forget that girl. And let me tell you, boy, a girl in hand is worth two in the moon any day. Are you coming with me?"

"No, I can't. I'm sorry."

She desisted, not without firing a contemptuous parting shot:

"Ah, you are one of those nasty men who keep your bedroom locked to keep out a bit of joy!"

Gombarov laughed, and said to himself: "Well, she doesn't keep hers locked, that's certain. 'Joy of all nations!' A regular Babel of love, according to her own account. What an amusing creature!"

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All his other thoughts had left him, and he was seized with a desire for Winifred, who was as far away as the moon.

JOY OF JOYS

The joy, after an exciting, full-lived day, of being in bed, lying still and feeling the tingle of the blood through weary legs, half-conscious of the gradual dropping into sleep!

Two different church bells struck the hour of two. One was a new bell, and its clang was hard, hoarse, of a muffled deepness. The other was an old bell, of bell-metal loved of its maker, and its sound was sweet and clear, tinged with silver; there was in it the reminiscent sadness of ancient years.

Each bell sang its separate song, and the louder resonance of the new bell could not deafen the clearer, more slender notes of the old, which evoked an image of a castle on a hill, of hooded, cassocked men walking in a sequestered court garden, in the centre of which, altar-like, stood a sun-dial, beside a playing fountain, exquisitely fashioned by men who loved their work.

Both bell songs, the old and the new, joined in the tingle of his blood, took their direction with it, and merging with the other in his brain, died away there. And with the last dying note, Gombarov was sound asleep. It was the joy of joys, obliterating all other joys and all sadness.



CHAPTER III: THE SOUL OF LONDON

*"Gather up the fragments that
remain, that nothing be lost."*
ST. JOHN, vi: 12.

ELEPHANT AND CASTLE

WITH the help of Alfred Welsh, Gombarov was soon settled, Elephant and Castle way, in a room of a house next door to where Welsh lived with his family, poor people who keenly felt the presence of an additional mouth. It was true that the prodigal was received with a fatted rabbit, but a single rabbit does not last a summer, and Alf, to use his mother's words, "didn't have 'arf of an appetite." In the back-yard, over the wash-tub, the harassed, grey-haired, little woman of over fifty poured out her woes to Mrs. Tufnell, Gombarov's landlady, who unfailingly carried the gossip to her lodger, with all the essential ornamentation and comment of her own.

Mrs. Tufnell had been, in her prime, "principal boy" in pantomime, until Mr. Tufnell came along and made her his "best girl," and ultimately, his better half, whereupon she retired from the stage, and in the comfort of a home lost her supple lines and grew fat, but retained the good nature, sportsmanship and temperament characteristic of the music-hall artist. She not only suffered moods herself, but was sensitive to moods in others, and was infallibly aware when her lodger was worried. She understood the precise nature of most of his indispositions, though he had told her nothing, and one evening, after she had placed some cold meat and salad before him and



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poured him out a glass of stout, she gently put a hand on his shoulder and said:

“Come, boy, it’s not worth thinking about. Chuck it! A girl like that is no good to you.”

He was astonished, but did not resent the intrusion. She was a good, simple soul and, in his loneliness, he appreciated her motherly attitude and understanding.

After that it seemed like a contradiction that a woman so generously disposed should have married a bailiff, as that was Mr. Tufnell’s profession. In the world in which his short, gruff, robust figure moved, he was “the chucker-out.” There is nothing cryptic in this, for, as bailiff, he had to superintend in person the chucking out of the goods and chattels of people who could not pay their rent. Some days he performed two or three of these ceremonies, and as he usually followed each with a whiskey and soda, he returned home full of his exploits, which he told with a fair seasoning of strong breaths, though not without good humour.

“It was a sight, and no mistake,” he was relating one day, at dinner. “There was the poor woman all huddled up with her miserable kids—an ’arf dozen or so, as far as I could see—and she sitting in a chair in the middle, dejected-like. And I says to her: ‘You’ve got to pay up, and if you can’t, it’s my orders to put you out. I’m sorry, ma’am, but it’s my duty.’ She raised her face, and I see she ’as a black eye. ‘Woman,’ says I, ‘who gave you that black eye?’ She says nothing. I goes on: ‘I suppose your ’usband’s been drunk again.’ Again she says nothing. Then I ’ears footsteps and the door of the next room flies open, and in steps a big, burly bloke with the face of a bull terrier. He gets up right close to me, an’ ’e says: ‘I can get drunk when I like, see? It’s not the likes of you that’s going to stop me.’ And he glares



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at me. Then 'e says: 'And what's more, I hits my wife when I likes, see?' An' he walks up to 'er and kind o' takes 'er head with 'is left hand, and a right handsome fist it was too, a regular beaut, and 'e says to me: 'Say another word about my woman's black eye, and I'll give 'er another, just to give you something to talk about. Say the word, and I'll oblige ye.' And the bloke made a move as if 'e was going to shoot out his fist, so that the poor woman shut 'er eyes, that she did. He almost forgot my being there. 'I'll show ye,' he yelled out at the woman, 'ow to spend the last tanner on ale, instead of keepin' it for your 'usband that wants a drink mighty bad after sweating all day to keep you and the kids in food and clothes!' He was about to let go, too, when in steps the two constables I had waiting outside, for I 'eard the sort of customer he was, and took precaution. . ."

Mrs. Tufnell, who was carving the beef, let rest the hand that held the knife, while she shot a look of scorn at her husband, as much as to say: "It's a nice kind of man I married, isn't it? A chucker-out!" He had more drink than usual, and she was annoyed, especially as Gombarov was there to see her shame.

Mr. Tufnell caught that look, and winking at Gombarov went on:

"Well, I ain't told you yet that other yarn about a woman with a black eye. She had a whole litter of kids, too! It's funny the number of kids all females with a black eye have. It was as if that's the way brats were made. . . . Well, coming back to this female with the black eye, I said to 'er, just to start the conversation going, to be social-like: 'Did your 'usband give you that eye, ma'am?' 'Me 'usband?' says she. 'Bless ye, no! Why 'e's more a friend than a 'usband!'"

Gombarov burst out laughing. Mrs. Tufnell, too, over-

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coming her aversion, smiled, as she sat down before her roast beef, potatoes and cabbage.

Tufnell, beaming at his success, thought to follow it up with maudlin tactics.

"Darling!" he said, between mouthfuls, poking a forefinger into his wife's ample side, to her obvious annoyance.

"Love!" he said, repeating the performance.

"You know you don't mean it!"

"Pet!" he went on.

"Sweetheart!" was his next effort. Then:

"Treasure!"

"Precious one!"

"Little one!"

In each case the inevitable forefinger emphasized the word, and it was hard to tell which annoyed her more, the action or the word. But he was proud of his inexhaustible love vocabulary and took care not to use the same word twice. He continued:

"Dove!"

"Duck!"

"Lamb!"

"I suppose you'll want me with mint sauce," said she, breaking her silence, much to his delight. "Well, go on with your blooming barnyard!"

"Bon-bon!"

"Sugar-candy!"

"Turkish delight!"

"I've noticed you 'aven't called me your whiskey and soda yet!" she retorted.

"I was leading up to that."

She saw her mistake, but it was too late.



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"There's a dear!" he pursued his advantage. "And I'm sure Mr. Gombarov wouldn't mind having a drop."

"You'll have to get it yourself," said Mrs. Tufnell.

He got up and fetched the bottle and syphon from the cupboard.

"Have a drop?" he asked Gombarov.

"No, thank you. I feel too hot."

Tufnell poured some out for himself into a glass and gulped almost the whole of it down. Then he took down the cage from over the window, and poured what was left into the little water bowl inside the cage. The magpie in the cage avidly drank its contents, and presently was rolling unsteadily on its perch, to the great delight of Mr. Tufnell, who sat watching, fascinated by the droll spectacle.

"Baby!" said his spouse, contemptuously.

"Baby wants some more milk!" said Mr. Tufnell, reaching out for the bottle.

But Mrs. Tufnell was quick to withdraw the bottle out of his reach.

"Baby has had enough milk. More than is good for him," she said.

He made no protest, but, fascinated, went on watching the magpie blinking, as it rolled from side to side on its perch. Caliban had at last created a mad world of his own out of a magpie and a mouthful of whiskey and soda, and it pleased him to look on and see that small caged universe swinging on its orbit and two blinking eyes answering the blink of his own.

"'Ere's looking at you, old boy!" exclaimed Tufnell, picking up his empty glass and raising it in the bird's direction.

Mrs. Tufnell gave another scornful look and said:

"Looking at you! Two blinking fools, that's what I call

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you. There's something to be said for the bird. Poor thing, he can't 'elp himself. But you! And you call yourself a man!"

"Let us alone, darling," he said, without losing his temper. "The bird's 'appy, and I'm 'appy. Eh, Mag?" he turned to the bird.

"What about the good folk that's done no 'arm to you that you've chucked out to-day? Are they 'appy without roof or shelter? To think of me marrying a chucker-out! Me that was principal boy in 'Jack and the Beanstalk'!"

"Well, what about it?" he asked, taking the magpie into his hand. "Someone's got to do the chucking-out. And one's got to live. In this blooming, blinking world you've got to be either a chucker-out or the chucked out. As for 'Jack and the Beanstalk,' dearie, you can't say that you look much like the beanstalk now," and, with a good-natured grin, he surveyed her tall, portly form, without a straight line or sharp corner anywhere.

"Yes," she retorted, "and the Jack Tufnell I married needn't 'ave looked in a glass to see a dog at 'is feet." She glanced significantly at his paunch, which, as he sat, rested on his lap like a small globe.

"That's all right, dearie," he laughed. "There's enough lap left for you to sit on!"

"I dare say, Jack Tufnell, if I had as many whiskeys and sodas as you, I'd see a good deal of more space there than I see now."

"Not a bad idea. Try it, Nell. It'll do you good to see this magpie looking like a blooming ostrich."

"If I could see that bird looking like an ostrich, then I'm sure I'd see you looking like a blinking elephant, and not 'arf so nice, I'm sure."



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"Don't say that, darling. Remember when I played the hind legs of an elephant in pantomime? That's when I first saw 'er," he said, turning to Gombarov. "When I looked through the peep-holes in the hide and saw 'er, my 'cart kind o' stopped. Worse luck, my legs stopped, and the front legs moved on without me—ha! ha!—and I got a raking over the coals from the boss. She was in tights," he explained, his maudlin eyes wandering reminiscently into the distance, "and she looked as neat as a thoroughbred in the Derby. 'Er back was turned to me, and I ain't seen 'er face yet . . ."

Suddenly, without a word, Mrs. Tufnell swept out of the room.

"Darling!" he shouted after her, as for a moment he released the magpie, which he held against his bosom. The bird flopped downward, but managed to find a grip on the apex of its master's paunch. He put the bird back in the cage and hung the cage up in its accustomed place.

"She's 'aving a cry," said Tufnell, and added: "It'll do 'er good. Women are queer crittures, God bless 'em!" and he went to the cupboard. "Sure you won't 'ave a drop, boy? It'll do you good. God bless the stuff!"

Gombarov's sympathies were all with Mrs. Tufnell. But the domestic atmosphere proved too much for him, and he ascended to his own little back room, where, if he looked out of the window, he could see hundreds of grimy roofs and armies of chimney pots. If he chose to limit his gaze to the interior, he found himself examining the pictures on the walls, scenes and views typical of the Victorian era: a discreet "Venus at the Bath" distributed by a soap firm in exchange for fifty coupons—her arms whole that she might hold a cake of Cleanola Soap in her hand; a tame Nero, resembling a Queen's Hall performer, rendering a violin solo amid Roman candle

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effects and falling stage screens; a Royal Academy "Spring," showing a scantily dressed flapper holding up a lapful of daffodils in the hem of her nightie; a Royal Academy "Innocence," certainly guiltless of all art; lastly, in their midst, and the mother of them all, the inevitable portrait of the Queen, who gave the name to her long reign, and without being autocrat had impressed upon her era the familiar characteristics known as Victorian. There was the inevitable cosy chair in the room, large enough to have accommodated and encompassed the Queen's own spreading formlessness, and as with most chairs of its kind, designed for comfort, its springs had gone wrong and protruded upward into "our poor hero"—as the Victorians would have called him. Here was the supreme Victorian symbol: this chair stood for the great illusion, Comfort; Comfort with a capital C, but Comfort with the springs gone wrong. This chair occupied about a quarter of Gombarov's small room and prevented what little freedom of movement he might have had. His efforts to relegate it to a corner of the room were constantly frustrated by Mrs. Tufnell, who replaced it in the exact spot it had stood in before, without a deviation of so much as an eighth of an inch. The linoleum bore the impressions of its four castors, so that it was not hard for Mrs. Tufnell to arrive at such precise results.

On the mantelpiece and chest of drawers, both overhung with tawdry, frippery draperies, reposed heterogeneous collections of bric-à-brac and gew-gaws, familiar to British households, the latest addition being a clay statuette, with the inscription, "One of the B'hoys"; it was a grotesque conception of a Bond Street type of young man with a monocle, as such a type existed in the popular imagination.

"Something to make your room cheerful!" said Mrs. Tufnell,



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as she deposited it on the mantelpiece in triumph, and added: "It cost no more than a bob." He saw that she had bought it for his benefit, so it was useless to protest. He reflected upon the fact that this was an age of museums, and that every house, however poor, was a museum, a repository of articles, great and small, due to the machine being able to turn them out in huge quantities. But there was no beauty. It was decidedly a quantitative, not a qualitative civilisation.

"All these things are waiting to be destroyed," said Gombarov to himself, wish being father to the thought.

When Gombarov reached his room, he sat down in his other chair, a rickety thing that had been too often sat upon, and its threatened collapse was a pleasure to look forward to. From this precarious position he surveyed the treasures of the room, tiring of which, he turned to look out of the window at the rows of chimney-pots and the numerous bird cages hanging outside the windows against drab walls, which appeared the more drab for the relieving touch of window boxes and flower-pots. This love of birds and flowers astonished him since his arrival in England. But he grew tired of observing, and was soon in the street.

Before the public house round the corner a barrel-organ was playing, and six small old women, black-garbed, in two trios facing, were madly swaying to its common tune. The arms of each trio were entwined round one another at the shoulder, as heads bent downward and bodies arched into two impulsive wave-like curves, torn skirts uplifted, they tripped forward, towards the other; then, in the contact, the curves reversed, the heads were thrown back, the stomachs forward, forming the apex of new curves, and thus, still facing, they tripped back from one another. The faces of the dancers were deeply furrowed, and crowning little clumps of black material, which

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passed for hats, gave one more touch of quaintness to these grotesque figures, shapeless, no doubt, to the ideal beauty seeker, shapeful to the artist of character, the gargoyle maker. They might have enacted the parts of the old witches round the cauldron in "Macbeth," and might have been drawn by Daumier, Goya or Hokusai. They were curiously of eternity, changeless of type, and were, in this sense, both old and young. It was uncanny to see such youthful resilience in such old bones, such ardent rhythm in such unrhythmic shapes, decked in tatters. The barrel-organ rolled away, the crowd scattered, four of the women walked into the public bar, the other two remained behind and over the grating in the pavement performed a certain rite usually performed in privacy.

Gombarov observed everything with child-like wonder, and the ribald and the vulgar seemed to contain for him not less of the essence of revelation than the refined and the solemn in this atmosphere of old-worldliness, breathing as it did ancient life and emanating certain indefinable energies which could only come from an accumulation of racial and historic experience.

He had also been observed, for he heard ironic cockney voices commenting on his appearance:

"I sa-ay, Bill, is it Bi-kon or is it Shikes-pirr?"

Gombarov was amazed that the famous literary controversy should have penetrated the consciousness of Old Kent Road. And he could not help laughing at the jest made at his expense. This was not the first time that he had been the butt of Elephant and Castle wit, and he had quite decided to reduce the length of his hair and to shed his artistic effects for more commonplace ones, less open to the assault of cockney ridicule.

He jumped on a 'bus going towards Marble Arch.



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MARBLE ARCH

It was different at Marble Arch. The most eccentric appearances excited comparatively little comment here. It was the market place of eccentric appearances, as it was also the market place of international ideas, or crumbs of ideas, such as were picked up by half-educated middlemen and dispensed to the rabble.

A little old man, shabbily dressed, bore a piece of pasteboard in his hat, with the inscription: "I am Tom Adamson, of Glasgow, and I am looking for my wife, whom I lost sight of thirty-nine years ago." Who has said that romance has vanished from life? Here was this scraggy little man. . . . But Gobarov was listening to the couple behind him:

"The darling!" a woman's voice was saying. "How he must miss her!"

"A lucky man, only he doesn't know it!" was the reply from her male companion.

"Brute!" said the woman.

Another old man, tall, hatless, with long white hair reaching down to the shoulders, and patriarchal beard, shabby, without laces in his torn boots, stood supporting a large placard on a tall staff. The placard bore the inscription: "THE MILLENNIUM IS AT HAND." Attached, lower, to the same staff, was a device containing various penny and half-penny leaflets written by prominent Millenniolites. One of these, called "The Millenniogram," purported to be, in the words of the sub-title, "Absolute Mathematical Proof of the Near Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ." It was by Thomas Smith, M.A., Professor of Mathematics at the Millennium Institute, "Author

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of 'The Baconigram': Being a series of diagrams demonstrating, in face of all contrary assertion, amply, and once and for all, that Bacon wrote Shakespeare." Gombarov found "The Millenniogram" a big ha'penny worth, containing as it did a dozen or more intricate charts, in the first of which the learned professor demonstrated to his own satisfaction that all astronomers had made a very serious miscalculation in the age of the world by seventeen seconds. Having thus established his authority with his readers, he proceeded to make various calculations: There were so many words in the Old Testament, so many in the New. If you subtracted the latter from the former you arrived at such and such a result. That number had to be borne in mind. Then, there were so many verses in the Old Testament, so many in the New. If you subtracted the latter from the former you arrived at such and such a result. Again, you had to bear the number in mind. Then, there were so many chapters in the Old Testament, so many in the New. If you subtracted the latter from the former you arrived at such and such a result. You took the resulting numbers and divided the first by the second, and the result by the third. With a little more juggling you arrived at the figure "1914," the year predestined for Christ's second coming. There were also various cryptograms, acrostics and other devices to establish the prophecy in the eyes of the credulous.

Many speakers were ranged on portable speaking platforms just within the entrance to the Park and tried to outcry one another in advertising their respective spiritual wares.

Here was a pious looking, dour Scot, above whose head was a signboard bearing the legend, "The Lost Tribes of Israel." On the reading stand before him was a volume of the Scriptures,



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from which, now and then citing a passage, he was demonstrating to his audience, in a loud voice and with a gesticulating hand, that the Ten Lost Tribes were none other than the Scots themselves.

Next to the Scot was a Socialist speaker, who, taking advantage of his neighbour's presence, shouted in a loud voice that he didn't give a hoot as to who were and what became of the Ten Lost Tribes, but that he was concerned with the fact that certain members of the remaining Two—he need not mention their names—were exceedingly active in doing "the Joseph stunt," cornering the world's markets and grinding down the poor.

"Hear! Hear!" shouted many voices.

While he paused for a while to collect himself for another onslaught the voice of the Theosophist advocate on the other side of him intruded upon his audience. The words, "karma," "ego," "subliminal self," "reincarnation," "astral body," "next existence," and other familiar terms of theosophical thought, drifted in on the Socialist's silence. The latter was quick to take up the cue.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he resumed, "if we are not worrying about the Lost Tribes of Israel, we are not going to lose any sleep about what's going to happen to us when we are dead, are we? The Theosophist gentleman next door thinks this is going to be an awfully nice world for some of us four hundred thousand years from now!"

The crowd broke out into guffaws. The speaker went on:

"A world without work, without trouble, without poverty, no rich men to order you about, your morning bacon and eggs coming to you without so much as lifting a finger, bushes

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everywhere with steak and kidney pies growing on 'em, spigots spouting gin and bitter and Guinness and old ale instead of water; that's what you are promised by the gentleman next door—four hundred thousand years from now! Ladies and gentlemen, you have something to look forward to! Keep your eye on the clocks, and when you have got 'free of the wheel,' to use my friend's language, which is a little matter of four hundred thousand years, a mere bagatelle, which I'm sure you won't mind waiting for, you will have such a good time when it does come. Isn't it too bad, the Capitalist has got to wait just as long as you have? In the meantime the poor fellow is going to be miserable on his pittance of, say, four hundred thousand a year, in his palace in Park Lane, with a mere dozen servants, a wife in silks and satins, perhaps a little Gaiety girl on the side . . . a motor car or two, Havannah cigars, wines and liqueurs, and what not—poor fellow! Can't we—that is you and I—give him a hand to free him of his wheel? Can't you and I do with a little of his Karma, a bit of a drive in my own car, eh? Are you content to eat winkles and sassingers and mashed while he is suffering on caviare and roast duck and hothouse pease and strawberries in January, and can afford gout and liver complaint at all seasons? Are you going to grouse when he eats grouse? I ask you, what do you get to eat when you are out of work and hungry? You go to some soup kitchen and are given a plateful of slops they call soup, and if you swallow a bit of bread afterward you can hear it splash!"

Laughter greeted the speaker's sally, and cries came of "Hear! Hear!"

While the speaker paused to wipe his brow, the low, clear



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voice of the Theosophist made itself audible again. "Karma teaches us," he was asserting, "that when men suffer, they do so through their own past mistakes and ill-doings, so that in countries where Karma is understood by peasants and labourers, the belief causes them to face their troubles without railing against God or neighbour."

"I quite agree with my Theosophical friend," the Socialist speaker was again quick to pick up the cue. "You men suffer through your own past mistakes. You have let a few men get rich at your expense, and if you are being exploited by them you deserve to be. You possess the power to be your own lords and masters, for there are so many of you—are you going to let a few idle men manage you? Or are you going to Church to pray? Perhaps you will find comfort in joining the Theosophical Society, which will no doubt teach you to live on what they call the higher plane, on fine thoughts instead of bread and meat. If you are wise, you will be ruled by your friends. 'Proletariat of the whole world, unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains!' Economic chains alone hold you where you are. Get rid of the chains first, think of the higher plane afterwards. Feed your stomachs on the ground-floor, and you can then have enough strength to climb upstairs . . ."

Again the speaker paused to take breath, while the Theosophist was enunciating: "In the words of Mrs. Besant: 'Let a soul radiate in every direction love and compassion, and thoughts of hatred can find nothing to which they can attach themselves . . .'"

Presently there was a commotion in both crowds, and there was a common movement to the left. Gobarov saw that the

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excitement was caused by the disappearance of the Lost Tribes advocate and his replacement by a new arrival, a jolly little round man, who, before taking his place on the platform, with the aid of an assistant unfurled a red banner bearing the following inscription:

The Only Wise Lovers of Mankind,
Considerate Masters of Animals, and
Grateful Disciples of the

ONLY TRUE GOD,
THE INFINITE GOVERNOR
OF NATURE

FOR THE ANNIHILATION OF ALL
FALSE GODS

Like KRISHNA, JEHOVAH, ALLAH, etc., for
the Propagation of Humanitarian Deism, and
for the Conversion of Jews, Christians, Moham-
medans, Atheists and other Unbelievers and
Sinners

Into Human Deists.

Many of the crowd gravitated towards the new arrival as they would towards a new clown at the circus. For not a few, like Gombarov, came here to be amused. He grinned with the rest at the amazing presumption displayed on the banner, and waited, with one eye on the threatening sky. No

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stepped back the little man resumed the platform and rubbed his chubby hands as a preliminary when a sudden swift shower struck the spot, causing "the grateful disciple of the Only True God" and his audience to flee for shelter, not, however, before the little man, with smiling presence of mind, explained that this untimely visitation of the elements was not due to any temperamental malignancy on the part of the Infinite God of Nature, but was rather the result of a conspiracy on the part of the Finite Gods against the True Faith. There was every reason to believe the little man to be correct in his supposition, for strangely enough, hardly two hundred yards away a suffragette was haranguing a crowd in comparative immunity from the downpour, but not so free from neckling.

As Gombarov came up, he heard a workington shouting at the speaker:

"You women want the vote so you can make laws against us men!"

"We only want to protect our interests," said the speaker. "As for that, you men have made laws long enough against us women. We must protect our interests!"

"That means you want to stop our beer," shouted another man.

"Milk is more important than beer," replied the woman.

"For them as likes it!" called out the last interrupter. "Milk don't agree with me, not since I've been weaned. . . ."

"Sure you've been weaned? Just like a man! Always thinking of his own tummy first!" This sally provoked laughter. She pressed her point. "Don't you see how selfish that is? Do you know who was the first person to be shot in the riots in the North when you men were trying to get the vote? It was a woman!"

"That was because she was in the wa-a-y!" cried out a cock-

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ney wit, whereupon the laugh went against the woman.

"Cowar-rds!" she shouted at the top of her voice, showing her temper for the first time.

"We may be cowards," retorted some one, "but we've got enough horse sense not to trust our women, children and lunatics with poison!"

"Yes, that's what you've made of the vote—poison!" replied the suffragette. "Your man-made laws are a shame to civilisation!"

"A shime to civilisy-tion, is it?" shouted the cockney wit who had spoken before. "What I sa-a-y is, it would be a shime to ma-y-ke it worse!"

"Shut up! Give the lassie a chance!" shouted another.

Gombarov enjoyed these duels of wit. He loved going among these crowds, which always reminded him of stage crowds, the crowds of Shakespeare. There was always a miniature, a stage element about these English crowds, and you were conscious of the *dramatis personae*, of the inevitable *First Citizen, Second Citizen, Third Citizen, of Voices in the Crowd, of Dissenting Voices, of Approving Voices*, of voices ebbing and flowing, of voices warm or hostile or both comingling, according to the measure of the orator's persuasiveness, wit, reason or personality. And how different the temper from that of an American crowd, before which no man dared venture to speak against God, Government, or the Established Order without encountering that most valid of arguments: a brickbat, a bully's fist, or a policeman's truncheon! This difference amazed him. He had seen so much intolerance, had been so crushed by it into a self-corrosive silence, that this common tolerance, this practical expression of the love of fair play, gave him the delicious feeling of breathing free air after confinement within prison walls. What finer thing than personal



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liberty was there upon this earth? Surely, it existed on this island, if anywhere. And he thought of the words of John Stuart Mill: "All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility. If all mankind were of one opinion and only one man against it, all mankind would have no more right to silence that one man than he, if he had the power, to silence all mankind."

Again he saw a connection between big and trivial things. He began to have a glimmering as to what underlay the otherwise inexplicable rudeness of small London shopkeepers, who, if you were dissatisfied, did not appear to care a hang whether you bought anything or not and allowed a prospective customer to depart as if money were of no moment to them. For every great virtue has a fault, and every great fault has a virtue. And independence sometimes leads to insult, excessive courtesy to cringing.

He saw that the significance of Marble Arch was that it represented the modern world and its contending ideas in microcosm. There was no unity, the world was here visible in all its fragmentary nature, restless in all its fractious contradiction. Thus Babel must have been before its fall. But for tolerance, the by-product of a complex, many-tongued civilisation, there seemed to be little that kept men from jumping at each other's throat. . . . Only some great intolerance, arising from some common danger, might weld together the fragments of humanity on this island into one functioning body, with one single-expressed face . . . Gombarov meditated upon a strange paradox of life. Tolerance did not, as one might suppose, unite a world; on the contrary, it broke it up, as it implied that a community with a million persons might have a million different opinions. A community of a million with a million opinions was a house a million times

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divided against itself. Only a common faith could unite, but there was no common faith, and a million discordant voices rose up to a godless heaven, which, were it not godless, could hardly, with the best intentions, be expected to distinguish the separate entreaties of so many-voiced a prayer. Yet tolerance was a fine thing, and unity was a fine thing. Could not the world have one and the other at the same time? . . . But here was the appalling thing: Tolerance, one of the finest products of civilisation, was a weapon civilisation had seemingly created for its own destruction; for if there was no common faith and unity and it was a thing all of warring fragments, what was it worth? . . .

Gombarov tried not to think. He proceeded deeper into Hyde Park and observed the numerous clasped couples under the trees. The lovers held each other in tight embrace, silently and immovably, and here and there a man bent over a woman's upturned face, his lips on hers, as if drinking, and still was their embrace, as if they were figures at Madame Tussaud's.

Gombarov was sadly thinking of his Winifred, so far away in Paris.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH

All the world loves a plot. It does not love the lonely lover, and it loves three lovers better than two. A loves B, B loves C, who is A's best friend. The world is delighted. Some one is bound to get left. That is called a "triangle." When it is not a triangle, then it is a circle, a vicious circle, a circle of circumstance or a circle of "psychic complexes," a sort of whirlpool in which the victims move round and round and no one can get out. The world outside has ceased to exist for the persons within this triangle or circle. It has also ceased to exist for the spectators forming this outside world, the




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army of novelists and the greater army of novel readers.

Of the greater plot, what might be called the all-embracing divine-diabolic conspiracy, which contains and absorbs all petty "plots" and "vicious circles," few have any conception. For such as have, "life is a caravanserai, men come and go." Only the nomad, the lone figure against the horizon, the person solitary in a crowd, unrelated as it were to any other person or persons, can comprehend his relationship to the unresting elements, the continuity of life, the continuity of change itself. No triangle or circle is there to imprison him, he is related to life, he is a moving atom in this eternally tempestuous, quivering universe, ever drifting, ever seeking contact, a possible inter-relation, with some other atom, perhaps finding none, or concentrating itself in momentary responses, and again drifting on.

Where but in London could a stranger find himself so peculiarly aware of his own separate entity juxtaposed to a universe of separate entities? Just as Gombarov never lost the exhilarating sense of being on an island, so he never quite lost the sometimes terrifying consciousness of being one among London's seven or eight million. His immediate family was in America. His other relations, with whom he had lost all contact, were in Russia. Winifred was in Paris. He was quite alone.

There could be, therefore, no sense of circumscribed plot in life as he saw it, but a kind of perpetual continuity, as of a flowing river, in whose waters, as Herakleitos said, "You could not stop twice . . . for other and yet other waters are ever flowing on." There was implied in this a change of scenery and of persons, a sense of things eternally coming and going, of diverse living craft forever drifting by, on and on. But the things and persons and scenes that thus drifted into his



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life or vision and drifted out again were in no sense a loss, but left a residue, a grain of sand, an atom of ignition, a phosphorescent irony, the accumulation of which, insinuating themselves into his system, acted as clashing irritants and transformed his personality, as it were, chemically, and without knowledge other than a consciousness of pain.

In his solitude, he sought distraction, explored London, visited public houses, talked to strangers, who often at first meeting told him the stories of their lives, and he absorbed everything as a river of life its tributaries. Everything was significant, nothing trivial. And, as he thought of life, his life in particular, it seemed to him that life was not a novel in the accepted convention, but rather a collection of tales, temperamentally attuned to a single character, whose personality attracted experience peculiar to itself; in short, life was not a "plot," but a collection, a pattern, of plots, with at least one single-coloured thread meandering along through the design to give it unity. Thirsting for adventures, he became the repository of other people's adventures, which, as they churned over in his soul, he made his own. But on occasions he actively, if only as an accessory, took part in them, and drew sorrow or joy or ironic pathos from casual persons as tunes from a musical instrument; and even a slight, plaintive tune, not unlike a folk song, sometimes contained elements of living folk tragedy, meaningful in spite of its quiet, low-pitched monotone, that acted as a deadening veil over life repressed, maimed and muffled. One such trivial, significant tune Gombarov drew one evening from a girl on Hampstead Heath; it was the tune of all dumb, hurt things. Trivial, yet it made him think of thousands of hurt lives, ground down by the Machine, in the name of Progress, that Moloch of Molochs!

He was walking along moodily. Darkness was beginning to



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descend on Hampstead Heath, to submerge its hillocks, hollows and trees in a purple mist. The lovers welcomed it, for it covered them, and it made the lonely brood. He, of the lonely, could see the recumbent everywhere. They scattered themselves across the length and breadth of the heath, blissfully quiescent. And it seemed strange to see so many human beings lying still under an open sky, bosomed against the bare earth. They evoked in his mind the picture of a battlefield, of himself a lone sentry. . . .

He emerged at last in the Spaniards Road. The night was warm and languorous, and the promenaders, grown too dense in numbers to be silhouetted singly, swarmed between the rows of intermittent dim lights and merged into an animated arabesque, strangely unreal in the ambient blueness. A Saturday night crowd, they shambled along slowly, stodgily gay, arm-linked—man to woman, woman to man—while the unaccompanied girls invited the scrutiny of alert-eyed men who stood ranged along the rail and made advances when the quarry appeared attractive and the chance offered. Motor cycles rested in the road in small groups and flashed their powerful rays, and the riders, dehumanised, grotesquely fierce in costumes of khaki and armour-like headgear, were surrounded by girls in coloured, shape-outlining jerseys, attracted hither by these masculine apparitions mounted on iron steeds, yet hardly mounted, for they seemed to be as much a part of the machine as the human body had been a part of the centaur. Here was the modern version, the mechanical centaur. Presently, one of these monstrous forms would be seen to lean forward, touch a part of itself, and the whole mechanism, as if suddenly awakened, would start to vibrate and snort. Then an arm, stretching forward, would clasp a willing girlish form, and lift it on to a small seat at the back. There is a sense of

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exhilaration in the captive's dimly lit-up face, as sitting sidewise, she holds on with a small hand to her abductor's shoulder and dangles her legs, stockinged in gauze. After a slow, loud effort the machine would lurch forward and suddenly gathering its strength disappear in the dark with the effect of a shot. Another, violently tremulous, follows. *Chuk-chuk* goes a third, sending out intermittent explosive chortles. Each bears its desired burden, exultant, into the dark. . . .

His depression reasserted itself, a loneliness overcame him. . . . He wanted to talk to some one. . . . He hungered for the company of a woman, if she had but an ounce of attraction in her, if but a pleasing voice. His was a fastidious appetite, but a hungry man must be satisfied with a crumb.

Thus preoccupied, he crossed the road to escape the hanjo man who had taken up a position and begun to sing that American importation:

*If you ain't got no money,
You needn't come around . . .*

He entered a narrow passage along a private garden wall. Here everything was dark and still, and as he felt his way his eyes gradually discerned along the parallel rail numberless clasped figures, standing silent and statuesque in mutual immobility. A bared, ghostly arm, like a streak of moonlight, showed itself against the perceptible yet invisible drab of man and spoke its simple eloquence. Elsewhere, beside a patch of white, the light of a cigarette was the sole witness of a male complement. The trees, sloping downward, sheltered other figures, and from the gorse came sounds of mingled laughter.

He retraced his steps through the passage and re-emerged in the road. A casual slender figure lured him on and to his timid greeting sped away in derision. Tired, and desiring



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cool and quiet, he once more descended on the heath, and sitting down in a remote, deserted spot, closed his eyes and rested. Thus he sat a long time.

A cough near by recalled him to himself. He turned in its direction. Not many feet away, leaning against a tree, sat a girl, whose face he could not see and who, like himself, appeared to be alone. Reassured on this point, he timidly crept nearer, and called out in a low voice:

"Do you mind if I sit near you?"

There was no reply.

He edged up closer and repeated his question.

Still no answer.

He got quite close. In the dim light he saw a pale girl, who appeared to have a pleasant face, though he could not distinguish her features.

Sitting almost at her feet, he again asked his question, this time quite loudly.

He thought he detected a look of surprise on her face. A slight pause followed, then she said quietly:

"I don't mind." She added: "You see, I'm a little deaf."

Again a silence. Then he addressed her:

"Are you lonely?"

"What did you say?"

"Are you lonely?" This time louder.

"I'm used to it."

"Mm . . . so? Been deaf long?"

"These past three years. Got it at the factory. A chunk of iron flew from the machine, struck the right side of my head and face. Was laid up for two months."

"Hard luck!" he said, and thought of what he should say next. He drew nearer, and was quite close to her now. He helped himself to a cigarette from his case with great delibera-

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tion, which gave him time to consider. The light of his match, illumining her for a few moments, revealed a small, pale face, darkly framed, a *retroussee* nose, and eyes almost lustreless but for a sympathetic glimmer that passed across them and lingered until the match went out.

"Do you read much?" it occurred to him to ask. He had to repeat the question, which, he had to admit to himself, was downright silly. Still, he had to make conversation somehow.

"I used to until the accident. And the light where I work is bad. I can't read often now."

Her favourite author? She had two or three. Dickens, and Elinor Glyn, and Marie Corelli. She didn't know which she liked best.

He fumbled in the grass and found a small, cold horny hand. It made no effort to withdraw, but lay docile in his large, warm, soft one. He pressed the tips of her fingers, until they grew warmer; they responded but slightly with virginal timidity, and beneath this reticence he felt an ardency all the more expressive for its hesitancy. Presently he realised something uncomfortable, an involuntary shiver passed down his back. "My God!" he exclaimed inwardly, and to hide his confusion mumbled something about having another cigarette.

She asked if she might light a match for him. By its glow he saw her face again. It was smiling, benign, child-like, barely suggestive of a quiet, inner happiness, and for the moment it made him nearly forget the discovery that had so startled him. He had noted this look before in the faces of docile women in public houses as they filled their men's pipes for them.

He manoeuvred over to the girl's other side, and grasped her other hand. Thank God, this one had five fingers! He found himself backward with this timid girl, and he held her



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hand with the bashfulness of a boy. But he got touch for touch, pressure for pressure, each slight but pathetically tender.

"Shall I give you another light?" she asked, having noticed that his cigarette had gone out. She removed her hand from his and struck a match. His head, stretching forward to receive the light, was now almost upon her shoulder, and he let it sink there. And even as she held the light he had time to observe something. She was smiling, and her mouth, slightly open, revealed instead of teeth a black gash.

Well, this was an adventure! He knew the keen pleasure he was giving her, so he tried not to think of her deafness, her thumbless hand, her mutilated mouth. All of her seemed to be maimed but her heart. She stroked his hair lightly, almost reluctantly, as if afraid of his head being suddenly snatched from her. And he tried not to think of her appearance, of her sordid story, which he extracted bit by bit, a common enough narrative, in its way, of the jungle of machines and machine-made people—and this life had not embittered her! He let his imagination dwell upon the dark, the grand dark, the blessed dark, which hid the ugliness of the world. He remembered nights, and moments in nights . . . but that was so long ago! And now again the dark, which swallowed him and this poor girl. Beggars they were, both of them, also prince and princess. . . .

"Do you like the dark?" he asked suddenly.

"Sometimes," she replied gravely.

"To-night?" he persisted.

"To-night!" she echoed.

They stopped while he listened to the bagpipes, which made themselves audible from the direction of Parliament Hill. A party of revellers passed by laughing. The clock struck eleven.

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"It's time to be going," she said. "The folks will be wondering."

She rearranged her hair, then rose and shook herself. This was his first opportunity for observing that her figure was short, unpleasantly short.

"Thanks for the nice evening. Good night!" she said.

"Good night," he said simply.

He did not offer to accompany her, and still eyeing her figure, he almost incredulously observed that she moved away *limping!* Poor girl! a perfect product, a symbol, of our machine-maimed age!

"Well, I'll be blown!" he muttered to himself, as the irony of it struck him. He lay back in the grass, grinned into the dark, and thought himself a philanthropist.

SOHO

There was another evening, in the early October. Gombarov went to the Palace Theatre. The evening was crisp and clear when he entered, but on making his exit before the final two numbers he found himself in the thick of his first London fog, a dense grey-purple haze shot through with shafts of light from the gas and electric lamps.

The crowd in Shaftesbury Avenue moved in fantastic procession, a blurred, conglomerate mass, as indeterminate as chaos, and looked at from the opposite side of the street it presented nothing more than a motionful darkness, above which, in the phosphorescent haze of muffled artificial light, there loomed, in half-defined silhouette, a leisurely feather, an accompanying topper, a scurrying bowler, and again a feather, a topper and a bowler; and everywhere were to be seen the moving, lighted points of cigarettes or cigars, worlds of a cosmos, and the occasional flare of a match, suddenly lit and curvingly flung



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into the street with meteor-like precipitancy. But when Gombarov looked at the moving crowd on his own side of the street, he still failed to define clearly the individual features. Only smiles and scowls, disembodied and intense, hovered above white shirt fronts or half-bared bosoms framed in fur. Was she not attractive, that sad-gay street sylph, whose palpable smile danced over her unseen features on a ground of pallor, in which two points, glittering, drew you, invited you in, to a revelation of mystery, joy, disillusionment?

The 'buses and taxis sped by, rumbling, muffled all but in sound, thunderously, thunderously dinning, because the ears functioned for half-blinded eyes. A laugh burst forth, shrill and hysterical, a woman's, come as from the depths of a womb, and for a while the fog appeared to vibrate with this gestating laughter. Gombarov turned to observe a drunken sailor reeling, one arm around a woman's waist, his fingers playing with the woman's breasts. Again she laughed her devastating laugh, that with shrill echoes diffused itself in the fog. Then came a running cry, approaching nearer; it was a newsboy's cry, loud and raucous and unintelligible, and it violated the thick air with its desperate insistence. After that he caught the fragment of a conversation:

"Yes, really," a voice, the sort one associates with the Public Schools, was saying, "Bergson is the prophet of the age. You see, old chap, it's all a matter of flux, the great life urge. You ought to read him. It's like this. . . ."

Gombarov turned to get a glimpse of the man who spoke, and caught what was obviously an artist's silhouette, with all the customary trappings, the large felt hat, long hair and a flowing tie. And again he caught the fragment of a conversation in a voice the very soul of maudlin good nature:

"And so I says to 'im, says I, 'Don't do it, Jack, for the love

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o' Gord' . . . An' 'e says to me, says 'e, 'I must marry the girl. It's not me that'll be leavin' a girl in the lurch after me doin' the dirty on 'er, and she a good pal and stickin' to me like a mustard plaster!' Well, what could I say to 'im after that? Come, Tom, let's turn into the Bird-in-'and and 've a mouthful. . . ."

"Mouthful, did you say, Dick?" said his companion. "Ain't a pint enough for you?"

Gombarov smiled, and was about to follow them into the Bird-in-Hand, when a beshawled, half-bowed woman's figure, with a man's cap on, accosted him from the neighbouring doorway:

"Gentleman, do 'ave a sprig of white 'eather, and 'elp a poor widow with six little ones. 'Ave a sprig, gentleman. It'll bring you good luck. Six little ones, gentleman, and not one o' them that's big enough to work. You'll be 'elping a widow, gentleman. Let me stick a sprig in your button'ole."

And seizing the lapel of his coat, she had the sprig of heather in before he could say a word. He dropped a six-pence into her hand.

"Thank you, kind gentleman. Bless you, kind gentleman. Good luck to you, kind gentleman!"

About to walk away, he heard her accost a joy-lady:

"A spring of heather for you, dearie. For good luck, dearie. Sure to bring you a rich sweetheart, dearie! . . . Thank you, angel-face! Bless you, my pretty. Sweet dreams to you, and a purse of sovereigns, dearie!"

Gombarov paused on the kerb and wondered what to do next. Crowds poured out of theatres and cinema houses and swelled the stream of chaos which sluggishly surged past him. Strange blurred objects detached themselves from the moving darkness, and darted across the way or into side channels.



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Something ponderous, on wheels, rolled by him, making the ground quake, and all that was visible of it, in large characters of light, was the figure "14," which, as it were, a number appointed by the mysteries, unattached and unsupported, moved mystically through space, and speedily receding at last disappeared into the dark.

Gombarov turned into Dean Street and walked the small narrow lanes of Soho, often pausing to look into the windows and doorways of tiny foreign restaurants, cafés and public houses, which were as toy havens and oases of light in a suspended black cloud drifting under the heavens.

Thus he walked on, passing lamp-post after lamp-post, shadow after shadow, silhouette after silhouette, until he came to the to-be-remembered lamp-post and, under it, ran into a to-be-remembered shadow and more than a shadow, a thing soft and of a plumpness and surely of a radiant, if for the moment fog-enveloped presence, overwhelmingly pleasant in the sudden contact. In short, it was a smiling girl, and at once it was to be seen, and certainly to be felt, that here was no ordinary girl, and no ordinary smile. In the impact they came together as in an embrace, and in their astonishment, for some moments stood immovable, face breathing into face, breast to breast, limbs to limbs, touching. She was panting from the collision, which had been a hard one, and together with her breath a delicious aroma poured into his nostrils from her neck and shoulders.

She was the first to disentangle herself, laughing. "I am sorry," she said in English, with a foreign accent, and was about to pass on.

"Well, I am not a bit sorry," he retorted. "On the contrary. It isn't often that one is so lucky as to strike an *Isola Bella*.

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... I don't mean the restaurant over there," he added, for they were standing close to the restaurant of that name.

"Well, you are clever to have thought of that," she said, with a good-natured laugh. "But I wonder what you would have said if we had stood by the Hercules Pillars or the Duck and Drakes or the Dirty Dick!"

They stood there laughing, and after an embarrassing pause he felt it incumbent upon him to speak, lest she depart and leave him to his own devices.

"It's my first fog," he began. "I've been walking about in it rather lonely, until I bumped into you. . . . What do you say to a coffee with me, or something stronger, if you like?"

The girl gave him a close scrutiny under the lamp-post, and said impulsively:

"I'm afraid I haven't got time to stop, but if you like to come along with me I don't mind!"

"Thanks. Righto!"

"So this is your first fog?" she said, as they walked on, side by side. "Well! I've been in London seven years, and I've been in many fogs, but this is the first time that anything like this has happened to me. You are an artist, aren't you?"

"I write."

"I thought so. I should think you were one of those persons to whom strange things always happen."

"Strange that you should know it."

"Oh, I felt that about you at once. If I hadn't, I shouldn't have stopped to talk to you. I have curious intuitions. But here we are!" She stopped before an apartment house in a narrow lane, and drew the keys out of her bag, while he stood hesitant. "You can come in, if you like," she said, "but mind you, *only as a friend.*"

They walked up three flights, then pausing before Number



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15, she unlocked the door, and on entering, turned up the electric light. Gombarov followed her in.

"Do take the big chair," she said.

She subjected him to a quiet scrutiny while taking her gloves off.

"I shouldn't have thought," she observed at last, "that you had grey-blue eyes with that black hair of yours. It isn't usual. And you've got a long head. Something in it, I dare say. Strange, but you are both cautious and impulsive, always at war with yourself. You don't know your own power. Your mind is free, but your body is tied. You are introspective. You torment yourself, inclined too much to worry, often needlessly. It is as if you were lost in the woods, trying to find your way out. . . . What will you have to drink? Would you rather have wine, or spirits, or beer?"

Astonished at her extraordinary divination of his character, he mumbled in an embarrassed way:

"I don't mind what I have."

"Come in and choose," and she opened the door of the next room. He followed her in.

"You've given me something of a job," he said, laughing, as he surveyed the bountiful shelves and the rows of variously shaped bottles with their variously coloured contents and the open boxes on the floor containing yet other bottles.

Beaune and Fraisa and Chianti and Graves were here, and Chablis and Pommard and Chateau Le Rose and Chambertin and French and Italian Vermuth, and Australian and Californian burgundy, and tawny port, and cherry brandy, and Hennessy and Martell Three Star, and Chartreuse and Crème de Menthe and Benedictine, as well as the Italian Strega and Russian Kümmel; whiskey and gin, and Guinness and Bass and lager, it goes without saying.



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"But the most precious bottle here one may not touch," he said with an air of audacious gallantry.

"No!" she laughed, "but you can choose any other." She obviously enjoyed his bewilderment.

He thought for a while, and an inspiration came to him. "I'll have a drop of vodka," he said.

"You thought you'd catch me napping," she laughed, as from a hidden corner she drew out a dust-covered bottle and held it up against the light. "Instead, you've given yourself away. You are a Russian, aren't you?"

"I was born in Russia. And you?"

"I am from Brussels."

"You speak such good English."

"So everyone says. What will you have after this?" she asked as they entered the next room and she poured him out a liqueur glass of vodka. "What do you say to Pommard?"

On his giving a sign of assent, she brought in a bottle and putting it between her knees very adroitly drew the cork, while he watched the graceful curves of her in the action. He noticed she had neat ankles and that when she walked there was a fluidity in the lines of her slender form. Her pale, somewhat dark-tinted face, with its awake brown eyes and nearly regular features, and her jet black hair, done into a Grecian knot, had distinction. No sooner had she poured out two glasses of wine than there was a knock.

"Oh, it's my violin instructor!" she said apologetically. "It'll only take about twenty minutes. You can amuse yourself by looking at the books."

She opened the door, and in came a stout man, unmistakably a German, with a violin case under his arm. He greeted her in a thick if good-natured English, and after she had introduced Gombarov as a "friend," she asked the new visitor:



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"What will you have?"

"The same as usual, if it's handy."

She fetched a bottle of Guinness from the next room and handed it to the German, who soon opened it and slowly filled a large glass with its rich froth, which clung to his moustache long after the first gulp. The girl brought her violin from a cupboard and resting it tenderly on her shoulder began to play, while the German corrected her between gulps of Guinness.

Gombarov, in the meantime, reclining in the big chair, sipped his wine, and furtively watched his strange hostess and the graceful movements of her bared arms. He pretended to be interested in the books which lay upon the table. Among these were Flaubert's *Salâmmbo* in French, Tolstoy's *Cossacks* and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* in German, odd volumes of Shaw's Plays and Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*.

"An extraordinary girl!" thought Gombarov.

After the lesson, the German helped himself to another Guinness, and having exchanged a few banal remarks, said good-night, and left. Gombarov's hostess sat down to her wine, and began to tell something about herself. Her name was Lina Linter and she was a waitress by profession. She had no need to be that if she were willing to sacrifice her independence by accepting the proffered assistance of influential friends or by marrying one of her several admirers. She liked men the same as women, as friends, as good pals, but that always led to misunderstandings. Why couldn't men ever forget that they were males? She loved books and music, and had she her life to live over again she would have been a dancer. It was her ambition to. . . Then, suddenly, she stopped speaking, and sat up rigidly against the back of the tall arm-chair, with shut eyes in a drawn face.

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Gombarov sprang forward and bent over her. "Are you ill? Do you want some water?"

Her eyes still closed, her hand imperiously motioned him back to his seat. He sat down and waited. His heart thumped violently. He waited.

At last he saw her lips move faintly, but her other features did not relax. She spoke in an even, unrippled voice. It was as if a dead mask and not a living person were speaking.

"I see a tall man standing by your side," said the voice. "A fine looking man with strong features. He is dressed in Eastern garb, a long embroidered garment that reaches to the ground, and around his waist is a golden girdle with long tassels. His head is wrapt in a golden-white turban. He might be either an Arab or a Jew. He stands beside you with a friendly smile, and one hand is on your shoulder. He speaks to you. He says . . ."

There was a pause, and one of her ears seemed intent on catching words mysteriously spoken.

". . . He says . . . 'Do not be afraid, I am with you, I shall not forsake you. Be strong, whatever happens be strong. You have yet much to go through. Your day is coming . . . you shall speak. But the day is not yet . . . not yet' . . ."

Again she paused, again her otherwise still face was poised in a listening attitude, but a strained look began to creep into it.

"He says . . ." she resumed, "he says . . . his lips are moving . . . he has something more to say to you. . . . I am trying to catch his words . . . if I could only catch his words. . . . He says . . . 'Keep your soul whole in the midst of a falling world. . . .' He says . . . I am trying to get what he says. . . . Things, other spirits, are coming between me and him. . . . I cannot hear what he says. . . . Dark spirits are moving between me and him. . . . He is gone. I can only



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see his golden-white turban moving away in the darkness . . . and there is a golden light playing on the turban. Now it is gone, gone . . .”

There was a long pause, while she still kept her face rigid and her eyes shut. Gombarov, too, sat immovable in his chair, overcome by the extraordinary revelation, the strangeness of his adventure. And expectantly he waited, afraid to utter a word, lest he break the spell and hinder the oracle.

“He is gone . . .” she resumed, “he hasn’t come back. Other spirits have crowded in between me and him, preventing communication. He is evidently your protective destiny. And as you have him, so you have nothing to fear. But let me see . . . let me see . . . let me look into your past . . . you have had a sad past. . . .”

And again she was silent. Then: “I see a little boy. He is running about in a forest in some faraway country. There is a large white house standing all by itself in a garden on the edge of the forest. The little boy is running along a path towards the white house. Now he ascends the verandah, now he enters the house, which is full of people, but there is no one to pay any attention to the little boy. No one, though the house is full of people. . . . He is very sad, the little boy. He is looking for his parents . . . he doesn’t know that he has no parents. A strange child, without parentage. . . . There is a dark, strange man in the house. He hovers like a dark fate over the house, and the little boy is afraid of him. The little boy sees him and runs into the woods again. He embraces a slender tree, and weeps as though his heart would break. Poor little boy, no one to look after him, no one to be kind to him. The dark man moves through the rooms of the house, and leaves his shadow everywhere. A quiet woman follows

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him about. Where he is there is she, but she leaves no shadow. . . .”

Gombarov listened to this strange recital of the story of his childhood, and whole scenes of that curiously remote life in Russian woods and in that white house rose up like a clear-defined dream, and dream-like there moved in it the figures of the shadow man, his stepfather, who had wrought ruin on his step-children and on his own offspring through the prodigality of his genius, and of the shadowless woman, his mother, who had submitted to the will of this man. And at the intense clairvoyance of the sharp images his heart flamed with sadness, and his teeth were set to keep back the flood of tears. He listened to that trance-possessed voice, as it rose from pathos to despair:

“Now I see flames! flames! The house is on fire. A terrible night. The shadow man is away. The shadowless woman and many little ones seeking shelter. . . . Now it is daylight. The dark strange man looking on at the ruins. . . . He says nothing. . . . A strange man. . . .

“Now I see the woman again starting on a long, long journey with the little ones. . . . I am going with them across many countries. . . . So many trains, so many trains. . . . Then a large ship. . . . I see them in a city with many tall houses. . . . What a lot of people. . . . Oh, poor little boy, poor little boy! . . . There are no trees in this city of tall houses, no place to hide in, no place to run away to . . . oh, poor little boy. . . .”

In this curious fashion she went on relating what he already knew so well, and he was filled with wonder at the mystery of her knowledge. Did she tap the well of his unconscious thoughts? He could not forget some things if he would, but after all, it was the present and the future that so vitally



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interested him, and he waited for a glimpse of these with his whole spirit in suspense:

“ . . . And a heavy burden hangs over his soul, weighs him down . . . he wishes to forget . . . to wipe out his whole past . . . as if it did not exist. . . .”

She lapsed into silence, while his eagerness grew. For it had been his chief thought since coming to Europe, how to pluck the past out of his heart to make his heart light, how to fling the albatross from his neck that he might stand up a straight man! Men sensed its presence and kept away from him, women ran from him as from a dumb animal in pain. Simple to himself, he appeared incomprehensible to others. The silence of the girl before him tortured him, and at last, in an imploring voice, as if she could help him, he let loose the thought that was so pent up in him:

“Tell me, tell me if you can, what shall I do to rid myself of this burden, to forget it altogether, as if it did not exist?”

There was in his voice a concentrated intensity as of his whole life's pain. So comes a first flash of forked lightning after the long suspense and enduring of a too long repressed thunder cloud. There was again a tormenting silence, while his temples throbbed and his eyes piercingly sought to penetrate the girl's mask, as if behind it reposed all the mysteries of existence, and surely the mystery of his own. Again came the even, unrippled voice:

“You must not try to get rid of it. You were chosen to bear it. You are a bearer of other people's burdens, as well as your own. It will grow yet greater, until it will seem almost too great to be borne. Then the burden shall burst into flame, and out of that flame words will come. A message for the world is being born in pain like a child in a woman's womb. You must be patient, you must endure. . . . You will take

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long journeys. . . . You will make friends. . . . All who are in your life now shall pass out of it. . . . Here he is again, the tall man with the white-golden turban. He speaks . . . he says . . . 'Keep your soul whole in the midst of a falling world' . . . He is gone. . . ."

She opened her eyes for the first time and wearily smiled. "How tired I am. . . . I am mediumistic. . . . Moments come when I am commanded to speak to persons I am with. I hope I have told you something that you want to know. . . ."

"Yes, you have. It's quite extraordinary. I am most grateful to you."

She refilled their glasses. The colour began to return to her face. They drank and talked of the mysteries of the world. And again she refilled their glasses.

"Would you like to try another wine?" she asked when the bottle was finished. She went into the wine room and soon reappeared with a bottle of champagne. Then she fetched three champagne glasses and placed them on the table. "I have a lodger," she explained. "I expect him in every minute. It helps to pay for the flat. He is a waiter at the same hotel as myself. He is an interesting, educated man and could do something better, but like myself he does what he does by choice."

Gombarov thought all this incongruous and mysterious, as everything that had happened that evening, and his own presence there was equally incongruous and mysterious. He sipped the sparkling liquid, and as he had had but a scant dinner, and had been excited first by the movement and colour at the theatre, then by the fog and lastly by the strange meeting with the girl and the ensuing revelations, the champagne began to take effect, and his mind began dancing like a feather in ether. He felt sublimely irresponsible,



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and drank more and more, not caring what happened to him.

There was a knock on the door. Miss Linter jumped up, saying:

"It is Max!"

Max entered the room. He was a pale-faced German or Swiss, with thin sensitive features, and but for the stains on his dress-suit and white shirt-front he had the look of a gentleman. They were introduced to one another, and Gombarov was relieved to see that Max did not resent his presence, but appeared to take the whole matter for granted as one of Lina's vagaries. He could not help wondering what relations existed between the two, and he had observed that there was nothing demonstrative in their greeting. The three clinked glasses:

"*Prosit!*" said Max.

"*A votre santé!*" said Lina.

"*Na zdorovié!*" said Gombarov, in Russian.

Gombarov was looking at Max. Max's face was of an intense pallor which gradually seemed to lose itself in the light, while his white shirt-front loomed large, like a starched wall, and great was Gombarov's desire to write on it in large letters, in black chalk. His mind writhed on the horns of a terrible dilemma. What, precisely, could he write on it? Yes, what? What? It was tormenting not to know what to write on it. Even if he knew, where was he to get the black chalk? But this was a secondary matter. If he only knew what to write on it! He racked his brains for words even as he listened to the conversation of the others as in a kind of tense dream. Though hell and heaven fall, though that strange box, that lit-up cubicle, containing him and Lina and Max, be hurled within the next ten minutes through space, he must know what to write on that colossal white shirt-front in large letters

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in black chalk! His mind suddenly lightened, and he laughed. Why, of course! He had the very words. Why hadn't he thought of them before? There was only one kind of writing possible on any kind of wall:

"MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN!"

He spoke these words half-aloud, of which he was hardly aware. As if penned by a flaming torch, the words were being graven on his mind in grotesque letters of fire, and he repeated, this time louder:

"MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN!"

He heard Lina and Max break into a laugh. As, in a sharp flash, he realised its cause, he joined furiously in the laugh, with his whole might and body, like a demon suddenly unshackled, and in this fierce laughter the burden that had earlier in the evening troubled him was thrown off completely.

"I wonder," said Lina, when the mirth had subsided, "what made you say those words? For I had been thinking. Max and I, you know, have been foretold violent deaths." And without waiting for a reply, she added: "It is strange, but one meets so many people nowadays who are doomed to violent deaths. . . ."

Gombarov listened to her, even while he listened to voices in himself. His mind seemed broken up into several compartments, each filled with a voice, and one voice appeared to have no connection with another. In one compartment the newly uttered phrase stirred:

". . . many people doomed to violent deaths."

In another compartment there was the thought:

"What a lovely girl! What lovely lines to her neck and shoulders! What lovely firm roundnesses those small breasts of hers, their points showing through the soft material! What a lovely mystery her whole body must be!"



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Simultaneously, in a third compartment, the thought persisted:

"If I could only write on that white shirt-front, in large letters, in black chalk: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN!"

There were other, pettier thoughts, stirring in yet other compartments. He felt strange: his mind was intensely clear and he held a rein on each thought. He was like a blindfolded chess-player playing twenty simultaneous games, each separate board clearly outlined in his mental vision.

Then, with ecstatic image-defining clarity, he saw the fantastic absurdity of the whole thing, of this strange room, and of the strange three beings in it, of his strangely drifting into this out of the fog. Was it dream, or nightmare, or phantasmagoria? And again he thought of this strange London, incomprehensible city of a million compartments, of this strange old London, which was like a huge old brain, made up of millions of cells, impressed with millions of memories and images, interspersed among tortuous convolutions and over throbbing arteries, some dulled and deadened, some continuing their reflex life, some grown over with multitudinous cells such as this, alive with a strange stirring as of maggots in a corpse. How many such cells were there in this human heap, how many oases of flame and light and phosphorescent activity, how many centres of cerebral combustion, islands of irrepressible forces, daemonic in intensity?

His intense thought swept through him like a hurricane, flung open the doors of all the separate compartments of his brain, until all the outpouring thoughts fused into a single thought, became one flame, one immense image, not unlike the building of his dream at Paris, many-cellular and many-corridorred, its foundations deep in the earth, its top piercing

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the clouds, from top to bottom groaning and clamorous, as of a habitation tottering to its doom. . . .

He dared not sit any longer. He must move. He must run. He must sing. He must shout. . . .

Next morning he woke in his own bed. His head ached. He rubbed his eyes, and wondered what had happened to him. He lay very quietly and thought. He did not move, though he heard the door of his room open, then footsteps approaching. He saw Julius Strogovsky gravely standing over him, and his dead eyes were looking up into his friend's without the slightest tremor.

Julius, who years ago had been intimate with him in Philadelphia, had lately arrived from Germany, and had induced him to remove from Mrs. Tufnell's at Elephant and Castle into this more ostentatious boarding-residence in Princes Square.

"I am afraid you are too late for breakfast," said Julius. "I tried to wake you, but you slept like the dead. Even the alarm clock, which I put to your ear, failed to do the trick. What were you up to last night, my boy? Give an account of yourself."

Gombarov did not reply at once. He kept on looking fixedly at the morose if kindly face of his friend, then said:

"I think I must have had a dream . . . a strange, terrible dream."

"You may have had a dream," said Julius. "I know nothing about that. But it doesn't explain your coming in at three in the morning. I couldn't sleep again last night, and I heard you."

"Then it was not a dream," replied Gombarov. "Certainly, a dream could not have been stranger. Perhaps I had better



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call it a nightmare." And he relapsed into silence, while his mind tried to disentangle the events of the evening.

"I'll get the maid to bring you a cup of tea, and you will feel more fit to tell me about it," suggested Julius, who then went into the corridor and called Lily, a pretty Yorkshire girl, new in domestic service.

Lily came in and gave a knowing wink at Gombarov, as if to say, "I know all about it. Boys will be boys!" She soon returned with a cup of tea and two slices of bread and butter.

And Gombarov narrated to his friend everything that he remembered of his evening, and concluded:

"I do not exactly remember how I left and how I got home. But I have a vague sort of recollection of stopping in Bayswater Road to look at seven poor old wretches, men and women, huddled together on a form under the trees. It was bitterly cold, and they leant against one another at an angle. That angle has somehow eaten itself into my consciousness. I remember I thought of Maeterlinck's *The Blind*. And I also remember looking at that great row of palatial houses across the street, and imagining the interior of one of the bedrooms . . . a lovely woman lying in the arms of a man in a comfortable warm bed, her nice soft expensive things over the arm of a chair. One thing has dropped to the floor. It's a camisole. I don't know why, precisely, I thought of a camisole. But there it is, I thought of a camisole. And I thought, the cost of that fine silken camisole, with its embroidery, would have fed those poor seven wretches for three days, perhaps for a week. . . . I remember giving them all the loose change I had about me. . . . It's strange, but the first word I thought of this morning was camisole. . . ."

"What, in heaven's name, is a camisole?" asked Julius, breaking out into his characteristic chortles.

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"I'll show you one in a shop-window in Oxford Street," replied Gombarov, "and incidentally, a sample of British reserve. There is not a secret of woman's dress that is not exposed there."

"You are a funny mixture of seriousness and flippancy," observed Julius. "But strange things do happen to you," he added, not without a touch of envy. "Of course, you intend looking up this Linter girl again. You might give me an introduction."

"I think I can find her place again," said Gombarov, reflectively. "But I wouldn't swear to it. You see, I arrived there in one kind of fog, and I left in another kind."

That very afternoon he went to Soho. He had no trouble in finding the remembered lamp-post, which was close to the remembered restaurant, the *Isola Bella*. He then followed the route he and Lina had taken, noting a landmark here and a landmark there, which he thought they had passed on the way to the flat. And he came to a lane, which he thought was the lane, and he came to a house which he thought was the house, and he ascended the stairs and came to a flat which he thought was the flat. He rang and knocked, and expectantly waited. A smiling young woman, dressed in a kimono, came to the door, but it was not she.

"Is Miss Linter in?" he asked, falteringly.

"I don't know any such person," replied the smiling young woman.

There was a disappointed look in his face. She went on smiling, as if to say, "Won't I do?"

"Sorry to have disturbed you," he said, and went to look for the housekeeper.

"Miss Lina Linter? I am sorry, no such person in this house," said the janitor.



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Gombarov scoured the streets of the neighbourhood, without success. "Lina Linter . . . Lina Linter," he went on repeating. "I am sure that's the name." But he failed to find her, and in time she passed out of his mind.

Little did he then know that in days to come, nearly three years hence, his startled eyes' would read in the columns of a newspaper of the fate of a certain "Mrs. Joseph Koenig, alias Miss Lina Linter . . . shot in the Tower as a German spy . . ." and that it was not till then that he would recall again the strange injunction of his "protective destiny":

"Keep your soul whole in the midst of a falling world!"



CHAPTER IV: LETTERS, STRANGE MEETINGS,
GHOSTS

"Nothing was lost. The terrible past had a way of projecting itself into the future. Ghosts would arise and, holding hands, dance round him in a whirling circle."

ENTER POSTMAN

ALL the world's roads led to London. That was natural, for all the roads also led away from it; in particular, since Queen Elizabeth's day, when English adventurers and pioneers set forth towards unknown lands and seas and left behind them trails and highways, still binding them to their mother. After three centuries this energy had not wholly spent itself, and London was its heart and core, which grew and developed in ratio to the increasing proportions of the common body, called Empire.

Thanks to the accumulations of this splendid energy, the city had become like some vast, impersonal sea, and he who lived in it might take some pride in his city, hardly—unless he were arrogant—in his insignificant self. The presence of so many human beings bred an indifference, each being floated as a particle upon a vast sea. As a particle, it was insignificant against all this vastness; as a living particle, it felt intensely conscious of itself in all this vastness, even as a bather in the vast sea.



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What of a stranger, an alien particle, plunged in all this vastness?

Against the background of London Gombarov felt more and more keenly his own insignificance. The mystery of London, hiding behind a veil of indifference, was to him a frightening thing. Yet, strangely enough, it drove him, as a bather in a vast sea, to a thorough consciousness of himself, to take stock of himself, of his movements and strokes in the effort to keep his body up, and inevitably to regard himself as an independent world floating in the midst of a vastness, which might, at the least show of weakness, submerge him. And as one alone and learning to swim, he was horribly conscious of himself, and equally so of the vast and indifferent world around him. He saw this world, felt this world; this world, vast and inscrutable as it was, infected him with its impersonal personality; under its averted eyes he was groping, as in a darkness, towards his own individuality.

But there was one extraordinary day when Gombarov, a person of no importance, felt himself to be something of an international character. It was while he yet lived at Elephant and Castle with the Tufnells, and the beaming Mrs. Tufnell came in with a batch of letters for Gombarov:

“Six for you, sir. I hope it’s some good news for you!”

He glanced rapidly at the half dozen envelopes, and exclaimed:

“This is extraordinary! From six countries, Mrs. Tufnell!”

“Well, I never!” said Mrs. Tufnell. “You must be an important person, Mr. Gombarov.” She took great pride in her lodger.

It was true that one letter was from England. This, without opening, he knew to contain the rejected manuscript of a story. The one from America he also put aside for later reading. It

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was from his mother, and was sure to contain depressing news of the family. Poor Gombarovs! Their lot was a hard one. They were at the mercy of a cruel world. God alone could help them. Gombarov spent many weary days and nights troubling about them. The third letter was from Winifred, from Paris.

"Dearest one!" it began. . . . It went on: . . . Life was short . . . they were getting old . . . she was waiting for him . . . all in white ready for him . . . waiting for his knock . . . but he did not come . . . other young men came, with certain glances in their eyes . . . she gave them cakes and tea . . . again and again they came . . . and he, whom she loved dearly, was in London. . . . If he only truly loved her, he would hurry up and earn some money, and he would come to her . . . who, all in white, was ready for him. . . . When they were married, couldn't she be called Madame Gombarov instead of just plain Mrs. Gombarov? After all, they were in Europe now, and it was so much nicer to be called Madame than Mrs. Anyhow, it went well with his foreign name. . . . But why wasn't he there instead of in London . . . and why didn't he earn enough money quickly, so he could come and take her, all in white, ready for him? . . . Could he truly love her, yet not do that, and come? . . . If he truly loved her, he would.

A letter like that drove him to despair. How could he, "a stranger in a strange city," be expected to earn enough money from the most precarious of all vocations, not so much a profession as a form of vagrancy? . . . Why did she mention those young men, as if other young men existed! There was something about it which, rightly or wrongly, offended the male in him. This was a feeling with him rather than a reasoned conclusion, and as with most sensitive, intuitive persons, his



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feelings had a way of proving truer than elaborately reasoned hypotheses. Besides, he remembered how after all the seeming eternity of their love she had once forsaken him, and now he was no longer sure of her. His forebodings clung to him, and it was not for Reason, that moral, irreproachable goddess, to soothe away with her too cool fingers the throbbing pains of a passionate spirit. "Take cold baths!" say reasonable men of little passion to men of genius and to lovers, as if cold water could put out inner fires, as if the quenching of sacred flames was a thing to be desired. But whether reasonable men put up bathtubs or other barricades against their enemy passion, passion retaliates on the treacherous, becomes an enemy within the gates. "After all," thought Gombarov, "so-called reasonable men haven't any passion. They fight passion in other men, not in themselves." He could not cool his passion for Winifred, and it was a flame turned upon himself, for he was not sure of her.

With a helpless gesture he threw aside this letter and picked up a fourth. This was from Holland, but he did not recognise the handwriting. He tore open the envelope and looked for the signature. The letter was from Thomas Bowles, a young English painter whom he had casually met through Welsh. Gombarov and Bowles had taken to each other at once. He was a simple, robust and lovable fellow of Gombarov's own age, who painted the quiet English countryside, and in particular, English trees, with the same passion with which another might paint human beings or love a woman. He was faithful to his changeless English country, with its dear meadows and winding lanes. New art movements interested him without violating the eternal innocence of his outlook, and in this he was like his trees, which enjoyed standing still and steadfastly refused to imitate the shapes given them by modern painters. His

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wife, whom he had met at the art school, had given up painting, but spent much time urging her husband to steal something of the colour palette of the moderns if not their grotesquerie of pattern. Her mind was a whip that tried to set her husband's brain spinning like a top, but he was a tree, with the static soul of a tree, and his roots were deep in the ground. There was no spinning his mind round! She passionately loved her husband, yet never grew tired of enjoining upon Gombarov the folly of marriage for an artist, who, she thought, if he needed a woman, had best "live with one," without the formality of legal marriage. She considered women quite inferior beings, who ought not to meddle in the arts, though she herself showed undoubted talent in the casual exercise of her art. Like Gombarov, the Bowles couple despised Welsh, whom they had known since their art school days.

Bowles' letter was dated from Amsterdam. "A funny thing happened a day or two ago," wrote Bowles. "Madge and I were sitting in a café here and happened to be talking about you, when a young American chap, who was sitting with his wife at the next table, leant over towards me, and, excusing himself, asked whether the John Gombarov they heard mentioned was the same Gombarov they had known in Philadelphia. . . . And so we spent some time talking about you. Curiously, his wife also paints. The couple's name is Davis. I thought I had better warn you, especially, as on their request, I gave them your address. They started for London yesterday, and may look you up. I thought the episode very strange. It made the world seem such a tiny place. . . ."

The fifth letter was from Germany, from Julius Strogovsky, who, seven or eight years before, had left Philadelphia for Berlin to study philosophy.

"My dear John," wrote Julius, "I hear that you have at last



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broken the shackles which have so long held you in Philadelphia, and are now in London. I heartily grasp your hand in congratulation. Yet freedom, too, for homeless vagabonds such as ourselves is more interesting than comfortable. These past several years have been for me, in a sense, years in purgatory, with rare glimpses into paradise. But this is to tell you that I shortly expect to be in London, and as I believe you intend staying on for some time, we shall, I hope, see something of one another, if you do not mind seeing one who feels tired and sick. Yours, with affectionate greeting, Julius."

Gombarov lingered with Julius' note in his hand, and, his eyes scanning the unseen distances, an image rose in his mind of the Julius he had known in Philadelphia, tall, broad-shouldered, pale, grey-eyed—blonde and wide-featured like a Slav—with impetuous ways, seldom walking but with a stride, seldom laughing but giving way to a series of pent-up chuckles, above all eloquent when not morosely silent, and possessed of a strong will which outwardly manifested itself like a clap of thunder. In an outburst of fury at the stupidity of his University instructors in Philadelphia he exclaimed: "Poverty or no poverty, I am going to Berlin!" And to Berlin he went on money he had collected from various friends and reluctant relatives. Afterwards he wrote for more money; Gombarov was among those to respond, in a small way. One gathered from what one knew of Julius and from his letters that between momentary opulences he lived like a dog, that he was heavily in debt and that his mind was as full of philosophy as his stomach empty of food. Two years of this life in Berlin served as a preparation fitting him as a student in a small university town famous for its philosophical school, the head of which was a world-wide celebrity. Gombarov had lost touch with Julius for the last year or two.

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Gombarov felt something infinitely sad about this letter. Had this fiery, strong-willed fellow, his junior, who years ago had set such an example, lost his will and buoyancy? What chance had he, Gombarov, older than his friend, starting his free life eight years later, after his long fierce struggle to support his family and with a physical and educational preparation shamelessly scant compared to Julius's? Wearily he put down the letter and thought how good it would be to see his friend again.

Tremblingly he examined the sixth envelope. It was from Russia, postmarked Astrakhan. Strange that he should receive this letter. Though he did not know the handwriting, he suspected whom the letter was from. Two months earlier he had put his London address on his visiting card, and with no other message placed it in an envelope and posted it to an old address in St. Petersburg, that of an old relative, whom he had never seen, being ignorant even of the exact nature of their relationship. The missive itself, the envelope with the card in it, was however intended for his elder brother, Feodor, and was addressed in care of this relative because that was the only address Gombarov possessed. When he had last seen Feodor, Gombarov was four years old, which is to say that he had not seen him at all. Feodor was several years older than himself, and their ways parted when their mother had parted from their father and taken unto herself "old Gombarov" as her husband. Feodor went with his father, John with his mother. John and his two elder sisters were so young when this had happened, and they knew so little of their own father, that it required no effort on their part to slip into the use of the name Gombarov, though their own father's name was Semenov. And there was bad blood between Mrs. Gombarov and her eldest son, Feodor Semenov.



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Hence, when John Gombarov sent so curious a missive to his brother, it was problematical whether it would ever reach him, and if it should, whether Feodor would deign to reply to a brother bearing the hated name. After all, twenty-seven years had elapsed since they had seen each other, so there was some reason for Gombarov trembling when he looked at the postmark and judged the letter to be from his brother.

“Strange!” he thought, “but why from Astrakhan, on the Caspian?”

For he did not even know his brother’s profession. At last he tore open the envelope, and found three separate sheets of paper, each written on in a different language: Russian, German and French. He took up the one in Russian and read:

“My beloved brother! I was delighted to get your card, but as you gave no inkling as to what language, apart from English (of which I know only a little), you know best, you have put me to the necessity of exhibiting my linguistic attainments. I am sure you will understand at least one of these languages, in which I am writing to you.

“It is strange to hear from you, and from London! For I have understood that you were in America. I too have been something of a rover. I have studied engineering in Germany and France. My home is in Moscow, where I have a wife and three children, but I spend some of my time in St. Petersburg. I am now at Astrakhan, after a protracted tour down the Volga, where I have been inspecting steam-boats.

“I intend shortly taking a holiday abroad. I shall visit Italy, Switzerland and Germany, and wonder whether you could manage to meet me either at Bremen or Hamburg. If you cannot, I will try to come up to London and spend two or three days with you.

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"You give me no hint of how you are, what you are doing, why you are in England, and frankly, I am astonished that you should bear the name of the horrible man who has wrecked our home. Your father, now a white-haired old man of seventy, his family scattered, is spending his last lonely days in Odessa. . . . However, we shall talk things over when we meet. Let me hear of your plans, and we can then make arrangements. I enclose my address in Moscow, where I am now bound.

"Your brother, Feodor."

"Most extraordinary!" exclaimed Gombarov, half aloud, and repeated, "most extraordinary! Most extraordinary!"

He automatically picked up the long envelope containing the rejected manuscript, and opened it. It contained a typed note instead of the usual printed rejection form. As he read it, he burst into loud laughter:

"Dear Sir," it ran. "I return herewith your admirable translation of the Russian story. I do not find that the readers of the *Empire Review* are much attracted by Russian literature, which is usually of a more disturbing kind than they care to read. Yours faithfully, Percy Primrose, Editor."

"Well, I wonder what they would say to the story of my own life, if it were written as a novel!" thought Gombarov, his eyes fixed on the morning's correspondence.

His whole past life seemed to be contained in this batch of letters, and what was furthest past appeared to come nearest forward, and to strike with greatest force into the future, like a far incoming wave that rolled onward and onward, and gathered itself up into a final fierce curve, as at last it struck shore. And yet since coming to England, he had been thinking:

"If only I could forget my past, put it wholly behind me as



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if had never occurred, if only I could rid myself of this oppressive burden, start life anew, then how free I should feel, how I should enjoy life!"

This was before that extraordinary experience in Lina Linter's flat, when that invisible presence, purporting to be the spirit of his protective destiny, enjoined him to wait and endure, until his future should bloom out of his burden as a flower out of well-manured soil.

But now, as he reflected upon all these letters, his past life, like a flood, seemed to burst in upon him and to overwhelm his frail, tired person, already worn by the recurring fierce tides of life, which advanced and receded only to return with trebled fury.

He awoke from his reflections and moved by sudden excitement, arising out of the consciousness of dramatic meetings to come, thrust his letters into his pocket and rushed out into the street. Too much wrought up to sit quietly on the top of a bus, he walked with a fast stride all the way in to Piccadilly.

ENTER ACQUAINTANCE

He walked rapidly in Piccadilly Circus, as one who has no eyes. At one crossing he ran into a couple, and stopped to apologise. "I beg your pardon!" he said, and was about to walk on. But he felt his arm seized tightly and heard a voice saying:

"No, you don't. You can't escape us like that, Gombarov! And we were just talking about you!"

Startled out of his thoughts, Gombarov looked up, and saw that he had run into the Davis couple.

"Well, well! Only this morning I've heard about you in a letter!" said Gombarov, shaking hands with them.

"Oh, you mean from Mr. Bowles! He has told you how

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we met through hearing them mention your name. It's the most uncanny thing that's ever happened. And now, no sooner do we come into London—it's our first day here—than we run straight plumb into you. Really, it's uncanny. But come and have a bit of lunch with us."

And they walked into Appenrodt's.

They were mere acquaintances, such as seldom notice one another in their own city, but all but fall on each other's necks in a strange one. Points of contact are discovered and exploited to the full, a hitherto unsuspected intimacy creeps into the conversation, crumbs of personal gossip become mountains of interest.

"Is it true that you are married?" Mrs. Davis sprang the question, after they had discussed everything and everybody.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Why, when we left Philadelphia a month ago there was a rumour to that effect."

"And, pray, to whom have they married me?"

"Winifred Gwynne."

"Why, she is in Paris! May I ask who is responsible for this interesting information?"

"Let's see. . . . Oh, yes! I heard it from Miss Dooley, who had heard it from Miss Edgar."

"That dough face!" said Gombarov, spitefully, raising a laugh.

"All the same," put in Mr. Davis, "everyone is talking about it."

"I suppose I ought to feel flattered," observed Gombarov, "for, at all events, it shows that I have not been forgotten after a whole six months! I dare say, they'll be having me commit bigamy next, and making me the father of three sets of twins!"



BABEL

In his heart he felt incensed because the rumour was not true, and it appalled him to think how small the world was. There was a spark of pleasure, too, that he had not been forgotten, even though there was malice behind the remembrance.

ENTER FRIEND

A fortnight later he received a brief pencilled message on a postcard:

"Arrived last night, and feel weary and sick. Do be a good fellow, and come and see me as soon as you can. Julius."

An address in Princes Square, Bayswater, was given. Gombarov swallowed a hasty cup of tea, and hurried out to find his friend. It was not a part of London that he was familiar with. Thus far he had been cultivating those populous sections that were within the reach of his purse. High-sounding names frightened him, gave an air of inaccessibility to the places that bore them. He was at home with simple people, and in spite of his alien appearance invariably gained the confidence of all simple folk during the first few minutes of conversation, after which he might count on them to tell him the stories of their lives. They divined in him something that was quite outside themselves, yet with it a sympathy that comprehended them. They were mostly like that workingman he had once met in a public house, who told him his romance, then observed: "Now, what would ye have done in my place? It isn't as if you were the likes of me. One can see as you have more in your little finger than I've got in my whole brain!"

He discovered that his best way to Princes Square was to go to Queen's Road by tube. He had to change at Charing Cross and at Tottenham Court Road. There was something incredibly diabolic to him about this intricate network of

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underground railways. It was not that he had not seen the subways, tunnels and overhead railways of New York, but whereas these ran up and down almost as erectly and as disconnectedly as its streets, London's system, like its streets, was convolutionary, as if, indeed, the great city were a colossal, tight-knit brain, its diffused energy throbbing more or less evenly over vast spaces.

Gombarov found Princes Square and wondered, as he looked at the large colonnaded, ochre-coloured houses, whether Julius had come into a fortune to enable him to live in one of them. He rang the bell, and was admitted by a black-frocked, white-pinafored, white-capped maid, who conducted him into a large deserted sitting-room, full of large upholstered chairs. He sat down in one of them and picked up a copy of *Punch* from a table crowded with newspapers. He read the lines under the pictures as so many words devoid of meaning, for his mind was full of his friend. . . . He was picturing to himself how he would look. How slow he was in putting in an appearance! Long minutes passed. . . . Then the door quietly opened, and in stepped the tall form of Julius, tired and solemn and pale-faced; though three years younger, he looked as many years older than Gombarov. His hair, which in the old days had been long, was cropped short, like a German student's. Deep lines marked the face he had known as absurdly young. There was none of the impetuosity of manner that he had always associated with him. He was not prepared for such violent changes, and for an instant there flitted across his mind the image of Rudin in that ineffable scene in which Lezhnyov ran across him for the last time in the hotel of a small Russian town. He was so startled that he did not move at once. Julius came over to him. Then he rose, and the two embraced in the Russian manner, kissing each other.



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"Yes," said Julius, who had guessed the cause of Gombarov's astonishment, "I am Julius, your friend of old, and I am not what I was. Life is not *kinderspiel*. You can see it has been none too gentle with me. But you—you look the same as when I last saw you. That is strange, as according to all accounts, you've had a small army to provide for, which is neither easy nor pleasant when you have a little pack of your own dreams to shoulder at the same time. Yet you do not seem changed at all. . . . I hope your mother is well. And, by the way, how's your stepfather, the old Gombarov?"

"Oh, he! Still at it, immersed in the problems of the world. In particular, he is busy studying comparative cultures, as far as I can gather, in order to demonstrate the Jews to be the centre of the solar system."

"Poor man!" exclaimed Julius, laughing his old characteristic chortling laugh. "I am inclined to agree with Börne that Judaism is not a religion but a misfortune. . . . Frankly, I am not attracted to it at all. The study of philosophy, the exercise of supreme reason, makes all that impossible for me. . . . And how is your uncle Baruch?"

"Oh, Baruch! He has become a mere chemist's assistant. I cannot think of him but with pity, for I am sure he is one of the world's great men wasted. . . . Well, you remember how inspiringly he used to talk on science and philosophy, keeping us up till dawn, when you and I and Leon used sometimes to go out and watch the sunrise. Then for me, it was back to work at the *New World*. Poor Baruch!"

"Yes, yes, you are altogether a sublimely ridiculous family, and you by no means its least distinguished member. How often, during my first two years in Berlin, on days when hunger, cold and despair were my constant companions, did I think with tenderness and affection of your wistful figure and your

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grey, sad, old-world face, so strangely out of place against that madly boisterous background, and I thought of your patience and endurance, and I gathered courage from the thought of your courage. Ah, my dear John, do you know that courage is the supreme virtue!"

"I was not aware of possessing courage," returned Gombarov. "Indeed, I always thought myself a great coward for not kicking over the traces earlier. Now it may be too late. . . . I am thirty-one. I have stuck so long in one place. I have had no schooling, and feel myself supremely ignorant. But you, with your years at philosophy, your life and experience abroad, you must consider me a child. Like a child, I have often envied you . . . yes, envied you . . . and hated myself."

"Yes, my friend," proceeded Julius, in his soft melodious voice, "you are a mere child when I think of the worlds of Reason that I have traversed with the best philosophical minds of Germany—I will not speak for the moment of the world of unreason into which I have sometimes deviated—but in the very fact that you are an illusioned child and I a full-grown man, a reason-possessing animal, may be your deliverance and my damnation. For a child's mind is still moved by illusion and the blind energy that gives rise to illusion, and in this illusive energy there is stuff and incentive for his creating, if only a palace of wood blocks or a sand castle by the sea. And so the young spirit of the artist, taking possession of its material, however unworthy, impregnates it with itself and makes it live. . . . But Philosophy, Reason, is quite another thing. Its processes are quite the contrary. It disengages itself from matter and soars above it in the vast, infinite spaces. What can the creeping serpent know of the thoughts of the soaring eagle? The serpent is of the earth, and his wisdom is of the earth; and the eagle is of the



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air, and his wisdom is of the infinite air. . . . And so the philosopher, the man of Reason, looks down upon the earth, where, to his distant vision, all things lose themselves, become at best no more than a pattern as of a butterfly's wings, relatively a nothingness. Do you realise that there are stars compared to which the earth is a hand-ball? What meaning, then, can earthly fame and glory and wealth and ambition have to a thinking man? Reason gives man wings to soar above all earthly things. But it is not as an eagle that man flies above the earth, it is as a winged serpent, and there is ever that heart-deep longing towards the earth, which, however, is no longer the same, since a more rarefied atmosphere has been enjoyed. . . . Mark you, the great Plato destroyed his tragedies when he began to follow Socrates. . . . For the serpent can grow wings only at the expense of his fangs. . . ."

"Yet the eagle," interrupted Gombarov, "has a beak, and like the serpent, is still a thing of prey."

"That is quite true," replied Julius. "I was leading up to that. The original bird, as you may know, has evolved from the reptile, but the first birds had no beak, and that is the precise tragedy of man aspiring towards the heights. . . . He has neither a fang nor a beak. He is neither of the earth, nor of the air. . . . And that is my tragedy. You behold in me one who has desired and still desires both. And, having desired both, I have been in a state of incessant conflict. For I beg you to remember that a human being in general, and one of us—whose life, after all, consists of thinking, of continued, uninterrupted soul-processes—in particular, is a very complex bundle, and very variegated, and presents a most surprising play of colours when held up to the light: we are one and all things at different moments."

"Do you intend to say," interrupted Gombarov once more,

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"that the philosopher has killed the poet in you, that the one, in a sense, has overwhelmed the other?"

"Yes and no! That is to say, only roughly," replied Julius. "Reason itself is a kind of poetry, perhaps the supreme poetry, and soars above all things. If it were not so, Plato might have gone on writing tragedies."

"Perhaps it is a pity that he did not do so," said Gombarov in a manner that indicated almost a personal annoyance, for he was thinking this in connection with Julius and not with Plato. "There is the analogous case of Tolstoy, who, if he could, would have destroyed all the artistic work that he had done—all, in fact, that mattered—for the sake of his Christian philosophy, which few will read."

"Don't be angry, my dear friend!" exclaimed Julius, in a voice full of appeal. "And please don't speak disrespectfully of men whose genius has led them to renunciation. It takes the greatest possible courage to renounce. Had I been able to do it, I should not be returning to you like this. I am tired, life-tired! Oh, brother, cannot you understand me? Do you not behold me in my pain? All my joy is lost. All my illusions gone. Ambition a dream—though still mightily lowering upon me—fame, glory; nay, brother, the very essence of happiness, mark me, I have dissected, coolly, gradually, inexorably, and have found this essence *nichtig*. Do you comprehend what I am saying? Do you? I am coming back an old broken man to you."

He sighed. Then the soft look in his eyes assumed a harder, more determined character, as he went on:

"Be careful that you do not misunderstand me. You will do me the highest and most unpardonable wrong if you think that I have declared the grapes sour because they are beyond my reach. For, John, let me tell you, though perhaps you



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know it already: there is one spot, one little corner, one spark, that is pure, high and eternally noble within me, and though I may be the veriest serf and craven in many moments and days in my life, this one spark is the judge and decider in the highest things of my life. And all I have said proceeds from this one spark. And if I had riches, I would still be unhappy, still be identically the same: for these but cast an illusion of gladness and joy over one, and it is the conviction that such are illusions which crushes me. . . .

“Crushes me? Yes, a thousand times. Yes, for it robs the very basis on which the whole fabric of my entire life has rested. Right well do I know that no man worthy of the name rests on his oars when he comes to this point, but the task of remaking and remoulding a life is hard and terrible. Look at history. How few men have done it! True, it is already something to have developed even to this early stage; true, you must not esteem me so mean as to say nay to the task at the very outset. But I wish to be honest, I do not wish to lie, and as I know the terrors of the way which I shall have to wander, I tremble. But let this be uttered, this one word said, which I shall not retract to the end of my existence on earth: life is a bitter thing. This is glibly said, but upon whom the light of this knowledge first dawns, his soul quakes. And in spite of the reconciliations that await the hero who accepts life to the bitterest dregs, the ineffable peace that comes upon him who emerges from the awful conflict—Jesus of Nazareth, whether the tale be truth or fiction, to mention but one instance—in spite of this peace that passeth all understanding, though it may be sublime,—in spite of all this, I say, this and all that is concomitant therewith: the infinite woe that is the greatest teacher, and thus the sole instructor—in spite of this: let no glib tongue dare to impugn

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the name and honour of those who have honestly rejected life. A mighty people and the most preponderant and serene of religions, Buddhism, see in it their highest dogma; and one of the clearest and deepest thinkers, Arthur Schopenhauer, was its avowed and fanatical disciple. Do you know who would best understand such life-negating natures? Not the mob, the many, but the heroes of the other side. And one thing more: these heroes have not traversed the longer path. No, the scheme is not to be thought of as a single line on which some pause and the others go on, but rather as a common line up to a point, up to a parting of the ways. . . . But I am a rhetorician, although I have battled and am battling against it. Carlyle was a rhetorician . . .

"Well . . ." and Julius laughed, "here I am talking away very hard on philosophy on our very first meeting, but I haven't seen any one for days. . . . And I have so much to say to you, and I can't. Do you understand such torture? I dash myself against the gate, but it's barred, bolted, locked; and within such treasures! Do you understand such torture? Did you ever hear a certain story of a certain man, one who never had a moment of rest? By the way, the story says that 'never' is not what they call a figure of speech. Not a moment of rest. Every moment he lived. Just think of that! Not even in his sleep, or when he was roaring with laughter. . . . Well, *junge*, come out and let's have some dinner." And Julius hit his palm mightily on Gombarov's shoulder, making his friend wince. And he looked more like himself, the Julius that Gombarov remembered of old.

Such was the extraordinary meeting of the two friends, who had not seen each other for seven years.

They had dinner in a small Soho restaurant, where, over an exotic meal and a bottle of wine, they exchanged reminis-



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cences and discussed old mutual acquaintances and friends. As the evening progressed, Julius became more and more his old impetuous boyish self, while Gombarov developed an ironic mood, and Julius laughed uproariously at his apt if sometimes bitter quips made at the expense of men and things.

"I tell you what," said Julius, "your sufferings, which have, indeed, been great, have caused you to grow an ironic shell about you, which puts people off who do not know you. But my sufferings have wholly disarmed me, have opened up all the doors of compassion in me, and I suffer with all. Do you know, John, it sometimes seems to me that I have a greater capacity for loving than any of you . . . But come, *junge*, let's pay the bill, then get back to my room."

Once up in Julius's room, they resumed the conversation where they left off. Gombarov sat in the large chair, while Julius lay on the bed, propped up on the pillow, and from this position he talked as fluently as from any other.

"It is a terrible, a terrible thing," Julius was saying in a tired, poignant voice, after he had talked for some time. "It is a terrible thing to be able to soar, yet to have this intense longing for the earth, this intense craving for a body, I should say a particular body, so inseparable from the spirit, to feel always, always, that one is a lost, a wandering soul, or half a soul, ever seeking the other half, needful to its health, completion, spiritual well-being. . . . Ah, need I tell you? Can't you guess? . . ."

"A woman? . . ."

"A wonderful woman. A goddess."

"Doesn't she love you?" asked Gombarov, after an awkward silence.

"Yes, but matters are very complicated. She has a husband,



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a fine, brilliant fellow, and once my best friend. And she has two children. . . .”

“And she is in Germany?”

“No, in Italy, just now.”

“What do you propose doing?”

“I want her to come to me.”

“Has she her own income?”

“My dear John,” said Julius, leaning forward from his pillow, “don’t ever say such a thing again!”

“I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings,” explained Gombarov, astonished. “For, after all, I have touched a very sore wound in myself at the same time. . . .”

“Oh!” exclaimed Julius, with a new interest. “Where, then, is she? For you look miserable!”

“In Paris.”

“Why isn’t she here?”

“Lack of an income, my friend! Now, perhaps you will understand why I asked you that question.”

“Tell me about her.”

Gombarov told him briefly about his affair.

“Your position is comparatively simple,” commented Julius. “Surely, she has offered to join you here.”

“No. You must not forget that American women have a different conception of things. And that is what troubles me. I want everything offered up to me, whether I take it or not. That condition is a need with me. Nor is this need altogether actuated by selfishness. You see, life has been continuous change with me. All my life has been one effort to establish relations. But no one has ever stuck long to me. Life has been a constant dropping away of what has been won. Has it been my fault? I don’t know. I have always been faithful to a woman, loyal to a friend. Change may be salutary, but



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I sometimes find myself hating it. For however changeful a person's life may be, there is always at least one something, at least one thread, that he desires to be constant. In the midst of all change we seek an eternal note in life, one thing we may stick to, one thing that may stick to us. Since I have come to London, life has struck me as a thing essentially of fragments. All you have to do is to walk out into the street and look about you, or read the newspapers or get to talking to people and have them tell you about their lives, and you get the same impression: of boredom, disillusion, of a snatching at the fragments of life, not a single solid thing to cling to. It is as if a canker were eating at the heart of the world, and at your own heart. . . ."

"Have you felt that, too?" interrupted Julius. "But that is also true of Germany. One gets the impression of the world being in the state of an over-ripe cheese, all but falling apart."

"Living in the midst of all this," resumed Gombarov, "how often do I say to myself: If only I could depend even on one thing in life! And the more I think the more I say to myself that only a woman, and the love of a woman, can redeem me, save me from this horrible feeling of being always on the verge of falling apart. You will call this sentimentality, no doubt. . . ."

"Poor boy!" said Julius. "Yet nothing is so changeful as a woman's love. I think I may be right, after all, that it is better to be an eagle of reason than a serpent of emotion. One must learn to keep aloof from everything."

"But even an eagle," interrupted Gombarov, "has his she-eagle."

"Yes, damn it, that is so!" exclaimed Julius, and launched forth into an eloquent dissertation on love, from which his listener gathered that the speaker regarded the figure of speech

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as illustrative of a concrete and particular instance. It was apparent that the "she-eagle" idea strongly appealed to him as illustrating his own case.

After a time the glow vanished from Julius's face, which grew haggard and assumed a tormented expression. "Leave me! Leave me!" he implored his friend. "Leave me! I want to be alone!"

Gombarov rose and left, after securing his friend's promise to call next day. He went away, thinking: "What a strange fellow! And how strange that we should meet in London, we two, who were born in Russia, have known each other in America, each with a love in another country, the one in Paris, the other in Rome!"

Next day Julius called, and it was evident that the Tufnells did not take kindly to him. It was clear that they regarded him as a strange animal, an alien. Mrs. Tufnell's eyes showed apprehension of losing her lodger.

"How can you live with these impossible people?" was the first remark Julius made when they were alone in Gombarov's room.

"It never occurred to me that they were impossible," said Gombarov, naively. "I dare say, he being a bailiff is something of a monster. But she is a good soul, and has been as kind to me as a mother. Besides, I pay only nineteen shillings for the room and all the meals, which includes an eleven o'clock supper, if I want it. I may tell you I have taken to eating meat three times a day since I've been in England, whereas in America I could eat it no more than three times a week, and it's all included in the nineteen shillings."

"That is indeed cheap. Still, I think you had better come with me to Princes Square," urged Julius. "It will cost you thirty-five shillings, but we will be together. Besides, it is



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very important, if you are to get along, to have a West End address."

"I shall have to write more articles than I am writing now," said Gombarov, astonished at the last piece of information, and wondering how Julius had got hold of it after two days in London.

"I'll help you," said Julius. "We will, both of us, become practical, and write articles together. We will encourage one another."

"I'll think it over," said Gombarov.

Within a week, to the great disappointment of Mrs. Tufnell, he moved into Princes Square. Here the two friends talked and planned, discussed their love affairs, cooked coffee in a common pot over a methylated spirit lamp; tiring of which, they took long walks through Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park, and often continued their way into Piccadilly Circus. Again there were days and nights, when the pair threaded their way through all sorts of streets, and Julius, acting as mentor, pointed to this house and that, and informed his companion of its occupancy by some celebrity, past or present, whether duke, author, artist or politician. Julius astonished him by his wide erudition on this peculiar subject.

When they did not do any of these things or were sick of each other's company, they either walked alone, or were in their separate rooms, listening to each other's footsteps, as of a captive wild beast pacing back and forth in his cage. Julius's footfalls were the heavier and the louder, and as he was a poor sleeper he often continued his peripatetic meditations after the rest of the house was dark and everyone was in bed; it was not long before the occupant of the room below his complained of the disconcerting nocturnal exercise over his head.

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During this period Gombarov wrote fewer articles for his American newspapers than before, and he watched the ebbing of his resources with a perturbed heart.

ENTER BROTHER

A month after his rapprochement with Julius, Gombarov heard from his brother again, this time from Genoa. It was Feodor's plan to come up to London shortly. A week later a telegram came at breakfast, stating that he would arrive at Charing Cross the same morning.

Gombarov gobbled down his breakfast and, too restless to sit still, took a bus to Charing Cross, getting there an hour before the arrival of his brother's train. He paced up and down the main train floor, while his mind was engaged in speculating on Feodor's appearance. After all, it was no mean event meeting a brother one hadn't seen for twenty-seven years, and himself only four years old at the last meeting. What did he actually remember of his brother? Only this: his brother's grey school uniform and its silver buttons, as with his small legs, he, John, then Vanya, tried to keep pace with their wearer along the streets of Kieff. Nor did he possess a picture of him at any period of his life. There was nothing at all to build a portrait on. Nevertheless, a portrait did shape itself in his mind—perhaps, had shaped itself in the unconscious part of him for some time—Russian of feature, stamped with Russian melancholy, altogether like some Russian Hamlet in mood. Why should this portrait have thus persisted in his mind, in the absence of all evidence? He was, indeed, after what he had seen and known of the various members of his family, incapable of conceiving any new member whom he had not seen as a normal, reasonably contented being. He had subconsciously put all his knowledge,



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of which he was made up as a kind of mystic bundle, into the portrait of his brother.

Drunken with expectancy, he paced up and down past the platform gates. Ah, he would know him at once, the long-lost brother of his secret desire! The minutes slipped by slowly. He entered the refreshment room, drank a cup of coffee at the counter, and studied his reflection in the mirror opposite. The hot liquid warmed his blood and quickened his thoughts. He experienced one of those occasions, not uncommon to him, when coffee intoxicated him more than could any spirituous liquor. It made him keenly aware of his individual entity, and not all his misfortune and misery made him desire an entity other than was already his. If fortune were to come to him, he desired it only on his own terms; he wanted to enjoy it with that peculiar consciousness that he learned to know as John Gombarov, and not as any one else. Vile or good, he intensely desired to be himself. It seemed a strange, unreasonable desire. A lean, miserable bundle he outwardly looked in that mirror, but he felt, at all events, in that instant, the presence of the unrevealed, the invisible him, his true self, which, strong and proud and audacious, was chafing under the ludicrously unfitting shell conferred by ironic gods. In that intuitive, abysmal instant, there was revealed to him a black ravine, flooded as with lightning, tremulous with the fluttering of broad, black wings. This image formulated itself into a thought, and he said to himself: "I must dig into myself. What I find I must make an inventory of—on paper. Perhaps, I can dig up all my past, and get rid of it in that way. Then I shall feel lighter." But here was his brother coming to remind him, to show him the downmost bottom of the ravine that was his past. Nothing was lost. The terrible past had a way of projecting itself into the future. Ghosts

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would arise and, holding hands, dance round him in a whirling circle.

Another ten minutes to wait. He bought a platform ticket, and walked through the gate. And waited, waited . . . Unspeakable suspense, unutterable pleasure . . . A railway station was an alluring thing; today, like a fascinating woman, it held out intense moments. The huge engine triumphantly steamed in, trailing its long chain of carriages. Dozens of doors were flung open, innumerable porters hustled. Gombarov watched the passengers issuing forth. Immediately in front of him he saw a stout male form, its back turned, struggling with a large bag through a door. It scrambled down to the platform, then turned full face towards Gombarov.

Two glances interpenetrated. Recognition was instantaneous. The stout figure and the lean rushed towards one another and embraced.

"Ah, Vanya!"

"Ah, Feodya!"

Then they drew back, and scrutinised one another from head to foot.

"You are as thin as a herring," said Feodor, in Russian. "I could make a mouthful of you!"

"You are as fat as a whale," retorted John, in the same language. "You'd last me at least six months!"

"I'd make tough eating," replied Feodor. "I am all muscle."

A greyhound and a bull-dog could not have presented a more violent contrast. John was slightly taller. Feodor had a thick neck, a pair of mighty shoulders and a chest which would have done credit to a heavy-weight champion. They held their hats in their hands, and John's eyes were for a moment fixed on Feodor's huge head, with its scant, short-cropped hair, tinged with grey.

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"Oh, you needn't look at my hair," laughed Feodor. "I admit you've got the best of me there. You look like a poet with your long black locks. Are you a poet? Fancy, me a brother, and not even knowing your occupation!"

Feodor's clean-shaven, swarthy face was gay with the rippling smile of one who lived an outdoor life and knew how to make the best of it. There was, certainly, nothing about his person that suggested the melancholy Russian one meets with in books.

"Cheer up, Vanya!" he exclaimed. "Greet your long-lost brother with a smile from ear to ear. And, in a low voice, he began to hum a Russian comic song:

*Chook, chook, choomandra,
Navarila booraka . . .*

"I tell you what," he said, suddenly breaking off. "You are going to laugh with me for the next three days, for that's how long I am going to stay with you."

"Do you want your bags carried?" asked a passing porter.

"Yes, and a taxi," said Gombarov.

They walked behind the porter, Feodor laughing, John smiling. Behind his effortful grimace, John was thinking:

"Yes, that is how I should have been had I been properly taken care of. That is how I should have been if as a boy I had got proper food, proper sleep, proper education. That is how happy I should have been. That is how I should have laughed, I had the makings of a big frame like his, of muscles like his, of an outlook on life like his . . ."

And a picture rose in his mind of himself as a boy, waking, after five hours' sleep, to the clamour of an alarm-clock, wading through the snow in the night to secure his little bundle of newspapers, braving the frosts and the rains, suffering

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insults and humiliations . . . then, in the morning, scurrying home to breakfast and sleepily dragging himself to school . . . Three years of this! Then those other years that followed, in a factory, and . . . He did not want to think any further.

"My God! My God!" he whispered under his breath.

He walked beside his brother and smiled grimacingly, which made him feel like a pitiful gargoyle. He wanted to weep. Oh, how he wanted to weep! It came all over him at once, the whole tragedy of his life, the futility of his existence, and the futility of the existence of all the Gombarovs. Oh, how he wanted to weep, to bury his head somewhere, and weep, weep, weep . . . They sat in the taxi; his brother's robust hand was on his shoulder; it gave him the sensation of shrinking and of smallness, and he smiled grimacingly.

"What are you thinking of, Vanya?" asked Feodor. "Some one would think you were married to a vixen to have such a worried look! Are you married? To be sure, you are old enough. Well, look at me, my boy. I am married, am a father, too, three little ones, and I wouldn't give one up, no, not I, not for a mint of money. . . . Come, tell your brother what you are worried about!"

This was rubbing it in, as it evoked another flood of memories concerning certain quests in his life, not gratified. . . . With an effort he controlled himself and, incongruously smiling, replied:

"No, Feodya, I am not married. But I was just thinking how strange it was that we should have recognised each other. Just like that! Now, I recognised you by your nose, also by the formation of your eyes, but chiefly by your nose. You have our family nose, just like grandmother's, mother's and sister's, long and aquiline."

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"I can return the compliment," said Feodor, laughing. "I also recognised you by your nose."

There was a pause. John was thinking:

"There is this about a nose. Least of all the bodily organs is it dependent on food, affection, women, money, exercise, or disposed to any radical visible change. At all events, it always keeps the same size and shape, so that the only outward difference it may present is purely relative, in the degree that it may belong to a filled-out or a starved face. There is my half-brother, Absalom, whose nose seems to be larger since he has become a vegetarian, but that, of course, only seems so, because his under-nourished face has grown thinner. On the other hand, Feodor's face is almost round from good health, and so his nose seems smaller, though actually, our noses are identically the same."

Grotesque, naïve, child-like thoughts had a way of bracing him, and he said aloud:

"Yes, we have certainly been granted a nose. I always say to myself: 'If I win out in life, it will be by a nose!' It's an English racing term, and it suits our family to a T."

"What a huge city! What a magnificent park!" exclaimed Feodor.

They were passing Hyde Park, along Bayswater Road.

"Yes, and you haven't seen a fraction of it!" replied John, with a personal pride that might have done credit to a born cockney. He directed his brother's attention to points of interest along the way.

No sooner had he reached his room in Princes Square than Feodor began rolling up his sleeves, in order to wash. Lily was not long in coming in with a jug of hot water. Full of fun, and prettily smiling, she was about to walk out of the room, but Feodor, spreading his arms out, barred the way.

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"What your name is?" asked Feodor, in the best English he could muster, to the amusement of the others.

"Lily," said the girl, growing prettier with blushes.

"A pret-ty name," said Feodor. "Is ze pret-ty smile for me?"

Lily giggled with pleasure, partly hiding her face in her pinafore and teasingly showing one eye.

"You like my brother, yes?" laughed Feodor, chucking her under the visible side of her chin.

Lily made an affirmative nod and, still giggling, rushed out of the room.

"A handsome girl!" resumed Feodor, in Russian. "I dare say, you have a kiss every morning before breakfast. Out with it, you rogue! Say that you have. Or you are no brother of mine!"

"I have a girl," said John, half shyly.

"Ah, I congratulate you! And where is this girl of yours?"

"In Paris!"

"Hah, hah! That's a good one! In Paris! What's the good of a girl in Paris? And how do you know whether she may not be kissing some other young man?" asked Feodor, teasingly.

John winced. Ever since he had received that letter from Winifred, telling him of the young men who called at tea, certain vague suspicions troubled him with an irritating frequency. It suddenly occurred to him that Lily had a "boy," who took her out every Wednesday, and an idea came into his mind, which he would put to the test at the first opportunity. In the meantime, the trivial episode of Lily and his brother had given him another aspect of Feodor's bounty of joy, and this helped him to understand what lay crushed in himself under all the strata of pain and suffering. A no



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uncertain voice spoke within him, and asserted with conviction that had his life been better conditioned, he too should have been like that, a normal human being enjoying all that life gave to enjoy. And yet—that was the irony of it—he could not and would not live that life now. With his intenser perceptions, gained through suffering and experience of the arts, he was yearning for a life that was at once sensuous and exquisite, subtle-nuanced and many-faceted, like the dream he once had had of a room, heptagonal and seven-doored, each door leading to a new delight. But, as in that dream, so now in life, he sat in a hypnotic chair which held him helpless and from which he could not rise, though seven genii opened seven doors slightly and their dark-lashed eyes beckoned him on! “I desire too much!” was written in Greek over the portrait of a celebrity he had forgotten, and he thought: “It could be written over mine!”

The boarding-house mistress, duly impressed with the importance of the occasion, assigned John, Feodor and Julius a separate table in the dining room. This was to be appreciated when one considered the nature of the clientèle of the houses in that region in pre-war days. This clientèle consisted mostly of women, old and middle-aged, maidenly and superannuated, widows and wives and daughters of Anglo-Indian officers and of Colonials generally, by-products of Empire, living in idleness on small incomes, pensions and annuities. Without occupation and lacking outlet for their moribund energies, they vented their spleen on the poor over-worked housemaids, whom more than once Gombarov and Julius had caught crying in the rooms or on the stairs. Lily, it is true, being a healthy fun-loving country girl, got her revenge by mimicking the ways of the termagants before the two friends, but Mag, the other girl, took things to heart, and was so over-

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whelmed by Julius's pitying kindness that, to his chagrin and humiliation, she straightway fell in love with him, and, snatching his hand, would kiss it and slobber over it with the grateful affection of a dog, which caused Julius to keep his hands in his pockets whenever poor Mag entered the room.

Julius, who was in the dining-room first, greeted the appearance of the two brothers with an outburst of welcome. He was clearly overcome with astonishment.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "You two, side by side, look like a Before and After advertisement!"

They seated themselves and began to talk. They found that they could best get along if Julius and Feodor talked German, John and Julius English, Feodor and John Russian; so that there was the odd spectacle of three persons sitting at one table and conversing in three languages.

"You may well be astonished," Feodor said to Julius, "I come to London, expecting Vanya to look like a breezy young American, full of vim and dash, not to say business, and what do I find? A melancholy poet!"

"And I," retaliated Gombarov, "had expected to find in Feodya a real Russian, a sort of Hamlet, like Rudin. And I find—well, you can see for yourself!"

At that moment a young Canadian came into the room. He had never spoken either to John or Julius before, had hardly more than nodded to them, though they had been in the house for some time. Obviously he had taken them for outrageous foreigners. On entering the room, his eyes fell at once on Feodor and scrutinised him. A gleam of pleasure was visible in them as he made his way among the tables and paused before the animated trio.

"Excuse me," he drawled in a nasal tone, addressing himself to Feodor. "But you are from the States, aren't you?"



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The three of them burst out laughing, so uproariously as to cause the rest of the diners to look round. It was unusual to laugh so healthily in a place as respectable as this.

"Have I made a mistake?" asked the astonished Canadian, laughing with them.

"This man is a Russian," explained Julius. "This is the Yank!" and he pointed a derisive finger at Gombarov.

"Well, I never!" was all the Canadian could find to say, and after a bewildered pause apologised for his intrusion.

None appreciated the irony of the episode more than Gombarov, and more than once they returned to jest about it.

The brothers spent the rest of the day in sight-seeing, and John found it hard to keep up with Feodor's inexhaustible energy. They went to bed that night without touching upon very intimate matters.

Next morning John rose early. Lily came in with a jug of shaving water. She looked pretty and fresh in her clean white pinafore and white cap, her blue eyes were smiling, her pink complexion invited the touch of fingers or lips, a wisp of fair hair hung seductively over one ear and partly concealed it, her firm virginal breasts were outlined clearly.

As Lily put down the jug on the washing-stand, Gombarov took one of her hands, and she did not demur.

"Kiss me, Lily!" he said.

"I won't!" she replied, drawing her head backward.

He put an arm around her waist, and a struggle ensued. Once he prevailed, and held her tightly against him, his lips on hers. She made no further protest.

"What soft lips you've got!" she whispered, when at last their lips parted. "Any girl would like them. You've got a girl, haven't you?"

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"What about your young man?" he asked, without answering her question. "I know you have one!"

"Of course, I have. What about him?"

"Your young man wouldn't like your kissing me, would he?"

She laughed. "He needn't know, need he?"

"But you love him, don't you? I mean you wouldn't like him kissing any other girl, would you?"

"Let me catch him, and his number will be up!" she exclaimed with amusing asperity.

Someone in the corridor called Lily. Gombarov lathered his face and proceeded to make rapid strokes with razor across his face, to keep pace with his thoughts.

"Lily is nice as girls go. Brought up respectably. And she has a boy. And she loves him. Yet she kisses me and evidently takes pleasure in it. And objects to her boy doing it. And I, too, who didn't do it for pleasure's sake, nevertheless took pleasure in it. There's Winifred in Paris, and those young men who come to see her. There must be moments when these young men try to kiss her. Is she then different from Lily? But there must be other moments . . . do they, then, stop at kisses? Would Lily stop at kisses? . . ."

Thus his thoughts rambled on. One sudden, daring thought stirred above the rest, and agitated him. It was to agitate him for days to come.

All that day he and Feodor spent in sight-seeing, which included a strenuous visit to the East India Docks, as Feodor was interested in such matters professionally. They had lunch at a hotel in the Strand, where another of those extraordinary episodes occurred, confirming still more Gombarov's impression of the bewilderingly complex network of modern life. It was after lunch. They were sitting in the lounge, sipping their black coffee and liqueurs, just as they might in any lounge

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in any hotel in Europe. when a tall, broad-shouldered Englishman, who for some time had been looking intently at Feodor from another chair, walked up to them and said:

"Mr. Semenov, I believe?"

"Yes, and you are . . ." Feodor looked questioningly at the speaker.

"I have a better memory than you," said the latter, smiling. "Perhaps you will know me when I remind you of the Englishman with whom you kindly shared a samovar at Nijni-Novgorod two years ago."

"Oh, yes, Mister Richards! I did not expect ze pleasure to meet again. I found my lost brother. That is why I come here."

Gombarov was glad because of the interruption. He and Feodor had been discussing painful family affairs. Feodor had been urging him to adopt his own father's name, that of Semenov, and to drop Gombarov.

"What do you owe the man, except your troubles?" asked Feodor. "According to your own account, he has ruined you all, even his own children. As you may know, father provided some thousands of roubles for the education of Raya, Dunya and yourself. You were to have become a doctor. Instead the villain, whose name you bear, has squandered the money - on what? Just smoke, as far as I can see. As for your mother - and it is my misfortune as well as yours to be her son - what do you owe her, who has driven you on the streets at ten, who . . ."

"She has suffered," interrupted John. "If she has made a mistake, she has paid for it dearly. Who is to blame for people making mistakes? People cannot help themselves. They become wise too late, when all the mischief has been done. I remember when I was fourteen I wanted to run

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away from home. I often regret that I didn't, as it might have been better for the family as well as for me. Yet who can tell what is best in the long run? Who can explain one's actions or inactions, why one has done this and not done that? A thousand, or even ten thousand, previous actions or inactions, on the part of ourselves or our forefathers, may be responsible for the pettiest action we do in life. It is paralyzing to think of it. You do not love our mother, but what do I know of my father? I sometimes feel as if I were born into this world without father, mother, relatives, or country. . . . Whom do I owe anything? Who, except friends and occasional strangers, have shown me kindness or affection? But I was born full of pity, and I have always pitied all who have suffered . . . but whether I have loved I cannot say. I have hated my stepfather, and I have pitied even him. You ask me to change my name, but what difference can it make whose name I bear? Life itself, as I have seen it, seems ugly and unbearable, and it has made people what they are. We call ourselves civilised, but how often I have wished that I were born a savage. For I have the great misfortune to be able to see all sides, and so I pity everyone, including myself, almost without exception. Of course, I am sorry for father, at his age spending his last days alone. As for love, that is another thing. Tell me, why should I love my father, whom I do not remember, whom I do not know, who has left me all these years to my own fate, and what a fate? . . ."

"My answer is this!"—and Feodor drew a small photograph from his wallet and handed it to John.

It was a portrait of an old man of extraordinary beauty and dignity, with full-grown beard and hair as profuse as that of a youth, yet of a snowy whiteness that gave distinction, even loveliness, to the face, suffused with a spiritual softness, a



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kindliness, having in it an inscrutable something to kindle gentle feelings in others.

John silently studied the portrait, and a strange feeling came over him as from the sudden contact of a paternal hand for the first time. Oh, what sadness, what infinite sadness, was in those eyes, yet without a tinge of bitterness! Oh, father, dear father, take pity on your son, see what they have done to him! So young, and there is no peace or rest for him! He is quite alone, wandering to find home. He is at your feet, put your hands of blessing on his head. Ah, if you only knew how he needs your blessing! Holy man, father, God will hear you, if he will not hear him, your son! . . .

Gombarov was overcome by the intensity of his emotion, and the thoughts it engendered. It was the only time that he had ever experienced filial feeling, and he understood what a void had been his in the childhood that had passed. And he was like a child now, begging what was due to a child. This feeling flared up, a flame that filled his frame. He wanted to die.

"A fine head . . . a fine head!" he murmured faintly, handing the portrait back to his brother. Then, after a pause, he added: "You grew up with him, Feodya. Perhaps you can tell me whether you see any resemblance between him and me?"

"Not a little, but a great deal," replied Feodor.

"But I also resemble my mother a great deal," said John. "I'll show you a portrait of her when we get back to the house."

"I don't want to see it," said Feodor.

John took little note of the brusqueness of the answer, for a new thought, a new discovery, took possession of him. It was a possible explanation of certain clashes in his tempera-

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ment. Undoubtedly, his mother and his father were incompatible temperaments. Feodor was their eldest child, he the youngest. Between Feodor's birth and his the incompatibility of the father and the mother had time to establish itself. Altogether, his mother had had thirteen children, four of whom, luckily for themselves and others concerned, died at birth or in infancy. She had the fierce, unappeasable creativeness of a mother, and all the unconscious, fierce self-assertion of something that was part and parcel of nature, pre-destined, like Nature herself, perpetually to create; wherefore, Nature is so often referred to as Mother Nature, a creature both kindly and fierce. In "old Gombarov," himself a "creator," man of genius, irresponsibly creative, she found her mate and counterpart, like herself, like Nature, caring but to create, careless of the fate of offspring, who are left to shift for themselves, a prey to the strong, with no other defence against surrounding life but the cunning and protective colouring conferred by the instinct of self-preservation, which does not always preserve. John had inherited this fierce creative spirit from his mother, his philosophic reasonableness from his father, who was forty when he was born. As everything in life sought an expression, a perpetuation of itself, so all the fierce incompatibility of his parents chose him for its battleground, fought in him continually, would fight in him to the last day. He now understood why he was hard and pitiful, timid and assertive, why he wanted to write books and be the father of children, why women repulsed and attracted him, why he was so shy with them, yet wished to command them, make them do his bidding. His conversations on this subject with Julius were fierce, as if all his fierceness went into his words. No wonder Julius sometimes called him "Turk!"

But there was adventure in discovery, in the continuous



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finding of oneself, in the exploring of every crevice of one's heart and brain.

There was a painful pause after Feodor's remark, in which he conveyed his refusal to see his mother's picture. Then John observed:

"As you like . . ."

It was then that the Englishman whom Feodor had met at Nijni-Novgorod came up to them, and the subject was not resumed.

Feodor stayed three days and left, after exhausting John's energy in sight-seeing. They parted on friendly terms at Charing-Cross, but the departure left no void in John's heart. He was simply indifferent, and neither hated nor loved his brother. Twenty-seven years were an abyss of time not to be bridged in three days.

Yet this mood of indifference hid something else. It was a shallow crust which covered smouldering feelings, volcanic in temper. From half-past eight in the evening, the time of the departure of his brother's train, until twelve, moved by these fires, he strode the streets. But at night, in bed, his confused, tormented feelings crystallised into definite thoughts, which arose from the same point and pursued the same course, yet ultimately forked off into two separate channels, one purely personal, the other abstractedly detached; for he had a way, at odd moments, of escaping from his troubles in a philosophy, or, if not exactly escaping, then watching his affairs and his passions with dispassionate eyes, eyes of a spectator. Thus his thoughts ran on:

There was his life before his brother came on the scene. It was a bad enough mixture, full of strange, incompatible ingredients. All these fragments of his life were in a mortar, and his brother's coming was like the acting of a mysterious

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hand which held a pestle and ground down the contents of the mortar, and there was one ingredient which permeated all the others, and it contained the root and secret of all his desires. It was the creative ingredient, his mother's soul, now permeating his being, speaking through him, crying for perpetuation, for satisfaction, for material to wreak its passion on. This recognition of his mother, this new knowledge of himself, was a seed of fatality, since it fiercely clamoured for freedom, growth, abundant expression of itself. Knowledge did not act as a controller, but demanded further knowledge. "Knowledge of good and evil . . ." He pondered over the phrase, and thought: "But knowledge is in itself evil, as it arises from curiosity, curiosity leads to experience, and experience is evil. To experience is to know, and I want experience. There is something profound in the Biblical use of 'to know' . . . 'And Adam *knew* his wife . . .' An artist *knows* his material . . ." His mother's fires in him fiercely craved for a perpetuation of themselves . . .

And this led to the second line of thought:

Why was not this craving granted satisfaction? Why was he allowed to suffer so? Why had the poor Gombarovs to suffer so? Why did the whole world suffer so? And they all seemed to suffer from the same affliction: the thwarting of a thousand natural desires, above all, the desire to create. Why was he so sensitively built that all his own sorrows and thwartings, and those of the poor Gombarovs, and of the whole world, should take refuge in his frail frame, and rage and boil and seethe there? Was it that some day he might pour himself into a book? It was a terrible, an appalling thought to him, the sudden, flashing thought that he was chosen to bear it all for no other reason than that some day he might pour the concentrated essence of all this sorrow into a book, and that,



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in its turn, this precious essence might diffuse itself among men to console them with the refining processes of noble sorrow. That was, then, the meaning of the phrase of "Christ in men" . . . It was something to know the taste of the sacred wafer soaked in Christ's blood. . . .

CHAPTER V: BABEL'S GREAT MEN

"God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."

—ECCLESIASTES, vii: 29.

BREAKER OF IKONS

GOMBAROV had not been many weeks in London when he bethought himself of its great men. There were many reasons for his interest, and two in particular. There was the circumstance of his coming to London because he wanted to become an author, and he thought he needed a sight of great men and the example of great men. There was the second, equally essential circumstance of his having to earn a living, and the interviewing of celebrities for two or three American journals, with which he had contact, offered one source of remunerative employment.

As he often found himself shy even before ordinary men, the thought of standing in the presence of great men terrified him, and he knew he must do it precisely because it terrified him, if only to dare his soul and to conquer his fears.

In those days he had an exalted idea of great men. He imagined them as being but little short of gods, if in human form, from whose mere presence emanated an aura, a divine glow, whose very speech was as the emitting of sparks, starting a conflagration, where a spark fell. England, he knew, had



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several great men, to whose voices at least two, and sometimes five continents paid homage. But what if one stood face to face with one of these beings who possessed such far-reaching vibrant voices! Surely a fine soul took refuge in a fine body, and by that he did not mean that it was necessarily a large body, or a perfect body, but that it was essentially an expressive body, an instrument rich with magnetic force. And he still retained his old idea of man and artist synthetic in the same person, and could not mentally dissociate the two. Had he not read Plato's *Banquet*, and were not all who took part in it of the man-god tribe?

He made out a list of England's great writers and artists, and after some deliberation chose as the subject of his first interview no less a celebrity than Philip Jenkins Drill, known the world over not only for his novels and plays but also for his startling social theories and speculations in science. This man had the ear of the world, and into this ear, when he was not smacking it, he periodically sent down a hoarse whisper, full of evil portent, of dreadful prophecy, which too frequently had a way of coming true. One of his pet prognostications was the destruction of the world in a war in which the combatants fight each other by pressing buttons. The large public read his stories for amusement, in much the same manner as children read fairy tales or as adults read ghost or detective stories. It was an age in which the public, living comfortable, standardised, banal lives, demanded from an author above all a thrill, and if, incidentally, they got ideas with it, they were all the more pleased, since they were flattered by the implication of their belonging to the *intelligentsia*, a class pre-eminently fashionable in its admirations. He had his ardent following, however, among the usual minority that takes an author seriously even in England. England struck Gombarov

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as being a strange country in its attitude to abstract thought. The only men apart from a small circle of readers to give consideration to current ideas were the humourists of the press. Here was a limerick that went the rounds of the press at the time:

*There was a quill-driver named Drill,
Who wrote to give high-brows a thrill;
If you asked him for bread,
He said: "Bad for the head,
But here's an electrical pill!"*

Yet he was one of the few men who thought seriously. In spite of his obsession with the machine he undoubtedly had humanity at heart. His reputation was almost as great in other countries as in his own. His own, to be sure, intensely interested him, and he was constantly manufacturing explosive ideas to undermine complacent social institutions. One clever ironist of the time pictured him as a ferret-like creature, darting in and out of all sorts of mysterious corners and crevices, and always nibbling, nibbling, at the weak, rotted places of the social foundations of the Empire, which he symbolically represented as a huge Victorian chair, standing somewhat awry, its springs bulging. Another ironist, distinguished for his black and white designs, drew Mr. Drill as a circus rider standing upon two horses, one of which was labelled "Science," the other "Art." For like other men engaged in two conflicting mental activities, Mr. Drill drew the fire of the specialists in both. His scientific contemporaries dubbed him poet, while the poets contemptuously referred to him as scientist. A third smaller group, looking down from Olympian heights, asserted that he was neither one nor the other. Still, there was no gainsaying the fact that no contemporary was more provoca-



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tive, none more talked about. His work, "An Ideal Country," in particular, aroused the ire of the artistic clan, which saw in the imaginary world the author had created a synthesis of all the scientific prejudices of the time, wrack and driftwood coming in on the wave of Darwinism, a wave clamorously sibilant with now familiar sounds and slogans: "Natural selection!"—"Survival of the Fittest!"—"Evolution!"—"Progress!"

Ruthlessly the author had cut away the weeds of sentimentality, and with it the red flower of sentiment. His "ideal country" was a sort of a super-garden-city, covering the planet, and quite dogless and catless, and horseless and hawkerless; only birds were not excluded, possibly because there was no way of wholly exterminating them. The inhabitants of this country consisted of all sorts of progressive people, such as scientists, eugenists and teetotalers. The chief basis of marriage was a medical certificate. "Unnatural selection!" was the phrase one critic flung at the author in this connection. And the people, indexed, numbered and thumb-marked, existed by manipulating electric switches and pressing buttons, and by travelling at incredible speed in giant *de luxe* trains, which enabled everyone to see the world, a world grown smaller because of space-consuming engines. One correspondent naïvely asked in a letter to a newspaper how it was possible to see the world while travelling two hundred and fifty miles an hour. Another wanted to know whether a world so monotonously constructed, on principles so orderly and mechanical was worth travelling in, as on reaching one's destination one would come upon a place in no wise different from the place one started from. That, the correspondent argued, was inevitable in a world country in which nationality was abolished and men became super-cosmopolitans or synthetical citizens, living synthetical lives, speaking a synthetical language.

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indulging in synthetical habits. One irate artist wrote: "If this be an ideal country, give me hell!" Mr. Drill retaliated: "Hell, you say? Why, you have that already!" And he proceeded to point out all the meannesses, hatreds, prejudices, injustices, boredoms and banalities and all the fragmentary inconsequences that make up the existing world. "If this be not hell," he concluded, "I ask, in the name of Beelzebub, what is it?"

In choosing Drill as the subject of his first interview, Gombarov was actuated by several motives apart from the fact of the author's international prominence. The chief of these was what Gombarov called his humanistic attitude. Drill passed for a Socialist-Individualist; that is to say, he advocated a state in which individuals should be given all individual rights as far as they were compatible with the interests of the community. There was the other fact of his being a self-made man, of his having left school at the same age as Gombarov. Surely, a man of such wide sympathies, a believer in human justice, and one who had had to fight his way to his high position, would be courteous and considerate to a less fortunate individual, an appreciator of genius, and by no means a dunce.

Gombarov spent a whole morning in evolving a letter. It was carefully, and, he thought, attractively worded, calculated to appeal to a generous mind, such as surely belonged to the author of "An Ideal Country." After rewriting the letter six or seven times he posted it and began to look eagerly forward to an answer. Four days passed before a card from the great man arrived. It requested Gombarov to telephone at a certain hour the following day. This Gombarov did. The following conversation ensued:

"Is that Mr. Drill speaking?"



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"Yes. Who is that?"

"My name is Gombarov. You asked me to ring you up with regard to the interview."

"What do you want to know?" asked Mr. Drill in a brusque voice, that nettled Gombarov.

"I w—want an interview."

"Next week I am publishing my new novel, 'The Great Drifting,' in which I develop the idea that marriage in modern society is . . ."

Gombarov realised that Mr. Drill was trying to give him an interview on the telephone.

"I am sorry," interrupted Gombarov, "but I am afraid this won't do. Besides, the New York *Literary Leader* expects me to give a personal sketch of you as well. . . ."

"Do you think you can do it in fifteen minutes?"

"I can try!"

"Where are you now?"

"Trafalgar Square Tube Station."

"Take the Piccadilly Tube and come out here at once. The station is South Kensington, and my house is only five minutes' walk from the station."

Within less than a half hour Gombarov rang Mr. Drill's door-bell. He was ushered into the drawing-room, and was received by Mrs. Drill. She motioned him to a large chintz-draped arm-chair, whose presence astonished him because of Mr. Drill's powerful denunciations of Victorian comfort.

A door leading to the next room opened, and in stepped Mr. Drill, while Mrs. Drill, quietly, almost invisibly, slipped out of the room. The great man came forward and shook hands with Gombarov. He was a small alert man of no particular distinction either in physique or dress, and only his keen blue eyes gave any suggestion of the Drill one knew

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from the pages of his books. Had Gombarov met the man in a City office or behind a shop-counter he would have been far less astonished.

"What can I do for you?" asked Mr. Drill, motioning Gombarov to a seat beside him on the lounge.

Gombarov felt crushed by the man's business-like tone and manner, and Mr. Drill's appearance had been a shock to him. After an awkward pause, he said:

"I should like to have your opinion as to the place of the novel in our civilisation. . . ."

"That is a large question," said Mr. Drill, smiling for the first time. "I should say that the novel is the ideal, the supreme art-form of our time. Ours is a diverse, a variegated civilisation, and the loose, rambling form of the novel, untrammelled by rigid conventions, enables a writer to present all the facets of modern adventure, not excluding the great adventure of the human mind; that is to say, we are free to deal with ideas, as well as with action and passions. . . ."

Gombarov hastily noted down Mr. Drill's words, and said:

"But that is precisely what your critics have against you, that you put ideas into your novels."

"That is to be expected from men who still cling to Greek and Latin, to dead languages and dead classics. They fail to see that our Odyssey is in the present and lies precisely in new discoveries and scientific inventions and explorations, in man's unceasing conquest of nature. . . ."

Gombarov was about to put in an interpellation, when Mr. Drill suggested:

"Suppose you write an interview with me, and send it to me to look over."

Gombarov, who had not grasped Mr. Drill's meaning, looked puzzled.



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"I mean," explained the great man, "that you invent the interview, then send it to me. If I like it, I shall say so. If changes are necessary, I shall say so. If it won't do, I shall say so. My article on 'The Future of the Novel' in the current number of the *Empire Review* should help you."

"Very well, I am willing to try," replied Gombarov to the strange suggestion, which appealed to his sporting instinct.

They rose from the lounge, and shook hands. Mr. Drill pressed a button near the door, and a maid appeared to direct the visitor out. Altogether he had spent seven minutes in the great man's company.

He worked a whole week on the interview, using the brief conversation and Mr. Drill's article in the *Empire Review* as a basis. The article proved useful, but as it was out of the question to employ the same wording, he set to work to put some of its ideas into a conversational form. He was not, however, content with this, but wished to improve upon, add piquancy to, the author's hard, methodical, almost scientific, expression. He tried to give what he considered a brilliant turn to Mr. Drill's conversation, putting into his mouth picturesque metaphors and similes and ironical *mots*, the latter usually at the expense of Mr. Drill's unnamed enemies. Unfortunately, he did not observe that in improving on Mr. Drill he was eliminating Mr. Drill and substituting himself; he had not then suspected how deeply antagonistic he was to Mr. Drill and Mr. Drill's scientism. His own ideas were as yet embryonic. It was all, however, very exciting intellectual exercise, and he enjoyed it. One point upon which he heartily agreed with the author of "An Ideal Country" was the infectiousness of ideas, and the power of ideas, which have been eternally the inevitable prelude to individual actions and world events. He stressed this point, and evolving out of it his own chain of



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thoughts, made use of Mr. Drill's lips to give them utterance.

Gombarov was intensely pleased with the result. He posted the interview to Mr. Drill, and expectantly waited for its return, hoping it might be accompanied by an expression, however brief, of Mr. Drill's pleasure.

Mr. Drill's reply arrived exactly a week after Gombarov's despatch of the manuscript.

The first third of the article, which chiefly dealt with the interviewer's personal impressions of the great man, was passed by Mr. Drill without comment, save a few slight corrections, but once he came to the interview he was merciless and grew more and more cruel as he progressed. He began by crossing out a word or a line here and there, then proceeded to annotate the wide margins with blunt comments, which gradually developed into rudeness, such as "Tommyrot!"—"Tosh!"—"Rubbish!"—"Claptrap!"—"Damnation!" And he ended with a final comment, "DAMN!" in large letters, underlined.

That was all. There was no note, no invitation for Gombarov to come for a proper interview. After all, Gombarov had in one way or another spent a full fortnight on Mr. Drill. Couldn't he have spared just a half hour for the thing to be done properly? This imaginary interview was Mr. Drill's suggestion, not his.

He was in no mood to laugh at his intellectual misadventure. He tore the manuscript into fragments, and dropped them into the waste-basket. After a half hour of intense depression, he picked the fragments of the torn manuscript from the waste-basket and put them into an envelope, which he sealed up and addressed to Mr. Drill.

After his curious experience, he could no longer regard Mr. Drill's humanistic, democratic doctrines seriously. "The man preaches, but he does not practice," he concluded. He was



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not blind to his own shortcomings, but he had the passion for truth; and some feeling, too deep for analysis, told him that no really great man could have acted like that. For many weeks he made no effort to interview a celebrity. He dared not court another disillusion.

MAKER OF MASKS

It was not until one afternoon seven weeks afterwards that Gombarov, strolling about aimlessly, after paying a visit to the British Museum, suddenly drew up before a house in Bedford Square.

"Why, this is where Mr. Sherwood Saville lives!" the thought darted across his consciousness. "I wonder if I dare!"

Saville's name was better known in Moscow, Paris, Munich, Budapest and New York, than in his native London. He was a maker of masks, and these masks were of so wonderful a quality, so full of ineffable, potent meanings as of glimpsed visions of some promised land, that whole philosophies and commentaries were inspired by them throughout Europe, the chief aim of these writings being to show what these masks concealed, though Saville himself, in occasional essays, repeatedly insisted that they were not intended to conceal, but to reveal. An apostle of ideal beauty, his utterances were, in the main, directed against the Realists, of whom Drill was a characteristic example. Saville was as violent in reacting from the mechanistic age as Drill was wholehearted in his acceptance of it. In those days Gombarov vacillated between the two opposing schools of thought: his hard realistic life forced him to express himself realistically and to lean towards Realism in art, but in ecstatic moments and in dreams his words and visions took on decorative, abstract forms. And he never ceased to be moved by one deep hatred, that of machinery.

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He had hated inventions and all that went under the name of "Progress" ever since the days when he had worked in a factory, feeding the insatiable mouth of a machine with raw wool.

Gombarov knew little about Saville's ideas. He had seen but a half dozen of his masks in reproduction, and had read but one or two of his essays without quite understanding them, in spite of the astonishing simplicity of their language. And he had not yet got hold of a copy of Saville's most famous work, "The Meaning of Masks." He realised how ill-equipped he was for facing its author. Nor had he fully recovered from the effects of his failure with Mr. Drill.

When he found himself standing before Saville's house, he naturally paused to deliberate over his sudden impulse to ring the bell and make himself known. He felt nervous and perturbed. If Mr. Drill, an avowed humanist and democrat, a man who himself had risen from humble beginnings, and was now a pillar of light to the new generation, could treat him like that, what had he to expect from Mr. Saville, who was born a gentleman and in his art proclaimed himself an aristocrat? And he had not even written to him for an appointment, nor brought a card with him. It was a rash proceeding.

But he would do it! And now that his audacious self had uttered its command, the timorous self hoped and prayed that Mr. Saville might be out, or that he might be engaged and send word arranging an appointment for another day. Gombarov stood there, for some moments, on the door-step, one finger on the bell-button, which he suddenly pressed with a portentousness that might have done credit to one of Drill's heroes despatching a populous planet into the oblivion of destruction. He waited. And waiting, he caught sight of his dusty boots, frayed cuffs, and creaseless trousers. It was too

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late to withdraw; he heard footsteps approaching, and his lips were rehearsing the words he would put to the maid: "Is Mr. Saville in? Is Mr. Saville in?"

The door opened, but instead of a white-capped maid, a tall, strange, handsome man appeared and looked questioningly and penetratingly at the visitor.

"Mr. Saville?" asked Gombarov, nervously, and knew at once that he was in the presence of one who was unmistakably a great man.

"Come in!" said the man in a clear, deep voice, and stood courteously aside to let the visitor pass.

Mr. Saville shut the door, while Gombarov hastened to explain the object of his visit and apologised for coming unannounced.

"We can talk better in my workshop," said Mr. Saville, leading the way upstairs, until they reached the last landing, three flights up. "So you are an American," he remarked, as he fumbled in his pocket for the key. "Americans have been very kind to me. They are a go-ahead people. My own countrymen are in a sloth. Here am I, an Englishman, living in my own country, yet among all the strangers that come to see me my countrymen are few and far between. Yesterday I had a visitor from Argentine, this morning one from Vienna, tomorrow I expect a Pole from Cracow. . . ."

They entered the workshop, a large room, with an outlook on the square. The windows were high, so that only the tops of the trees were visible, giving the effect of country and seclusion and of incredible height from the ground. It was a workroom in every sense of the word. There was a large, plain, substantial table in the centre of the room covered with all sorts of wooden models and hand tools. A smaller, equally substantial table by the window was covered with papers and

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manuscripts; evidently Saville did his writing here. The warm ochre walls were covered with drawings, designs, paintings and extraordinary looking masks, all evidently made by the same hands. By the large table stood a hand press, on which the artist made his own wood-cut prints. There seemed to be nothing in the room to obtrude on the artist's personality. Three or four robust wooden chairs, unpolished, painted a dark brown, completed the setting, which was wholly natural and ideal for creative adventure.

Here, in the presence of these objects and of their master, a feeling of respect and humility, and of joy and sadness too, seized Gombarov. He was keenly aware of an inexplicably intimate atmosphere, yet an atmosphere curiously impersonal and aloof. It was as if he had seen the place, or some place resembling it, before; as if he tried to recall something that he had seen and quite forgotten. Mr. Saville noticed his preoccupation with the surroundings, and discreetly observed:

"Excuse me a moment while I make a note," and he sat down at the writing table and began to write.

Gombarov cast furtive glances at Mr. Saville, noted his distinguished profile, his longish hair combed straight back and outlining a head of harmonious proportions, his straight sensitive nose, his deep, wide-placed blue-grey eyes, his large clear-skinned, clean-shaven face and well-shaped forehead, prominent just over the eyes, and his firm neck: altogether the work of a master-sculptor, who evaded no difficulty, left nothing unfinished.

"A jolly room, isn't it?" said Mr. Saville, closing his notebook and rising from his chair. "Do sit down!" And he drew up his own chair.

"Not a superfluous thing in it!" said Gombarov, with enthusiasm.

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"No, not one!" said his host. "To work properly, one must have no distracting objects, no unnecessary chairs and furniture, above all, no banal works of art. One must have calm, nothing to make one fuss and fidget. As for working in the average furnished apartment, that is quite fatal. So-called inanimate objects made by human beings, have a life of their own, and our modern world is so full of ugly objects, whose mere presence has a bad influence on human minds, even on those who work in the arts. We need a new kind of Savonarola, who could hate ugliness as the Florentine Savonarola is said to have hated beauty. We want some one to make a scrap-heap and a bonfire of what men today call art, that terrible abomination achieved, I won't say created, in the name of Realism!"

"Why do you detest Realism?" asked Gombarov. "It seems to me that there is no reaching the great public but through Realism."

"That is a common fallacy," replied Mr. Saville. "Art is auto-suggestive, hypnotic, and so by depicting the sordidness of life, sordidly, the novelists and dramatists make the people not less, but more sordid. The cry nowadays is, 'Give the public what it wants!' but few realise that the public has been hypnotised by commerce into wanting what it wants. Give the public a certain kind of thing long enough, and it will want it again and again, as the drug fiend his cocaine. The spark of beauty that is in nearly all men has been smothered, but it is there all the time. Hidden, waiting to come out. There is history to prove this. Look at London! Towards the end of the Sixteenth and at the beginning of the Seventeenth Century, it had, let us say, between fifty and a hundred thousand inhabitants, yet think of its theatres, think of the plays in blank verse. Thirty thousand listened to Agathon reciting a

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prize lyric poem at Athens, the same number as would be seen at a cricket game today, and an equal number saw a play by Aeschylus, or a farce by Aristophanes. Consider how recently Japan, until Western Realism invaded it, was an artistic nation! Beauty was a true religion. Today we are agitated by problems. Problems bring furrows and wrinkles to the face of Art, and hence, also, to the face of Man. No longer is the face lit up with the glow of love, the courage of faith, the light of noble death. Everything is so fussy, and fidgety, and restless, and man is strutting about, a parody and a caricature of himself. The artists of today, with their insidious Realism, are everywhere engaged in intensifying the ridiculousness of the human figure, which has become a crazy-quilt and patchwork of problems, a thing of absurd fragments, like those Futurist paintings. While, all the time, underneath, buried and smothered under the confusion of collected débris, lies the true spark, the true soul, the audacious, child-like, god-like spirit of man. Not the ridiculous problem man turned out by the machine, but the beautiful creative man. The picture-maker. The table-maker. The garment-maker. The harness-maker. The poet. Each a master in his own world. Each a creator. Each taking a pride in his work. What a wonderful thing a man is, if he only knew it! What a bundle of fine impulses lurks in every man!"

Gombarov listened without putting a single note on paper. To have done so might have stopped the flow of fire. Indeed, there was a fire and a glow in the speaker's strangely calm face. He spoke with clearness and deliberation, yet each word was a word of fire. It puzzled Gombarov. He did not dare to ask a question. Mr. Saville continued:

"I think you understand. I could not talk if I felt that



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you did not understand. . . . Nowadays man has become a machine. There is but little warmth left in him. And so when they talk of man's power, they use the word 'dynamics.' They speak in terms of mechanics. It is not dynamos we want but dæmons! If we could only reawaken the dæmon in man! If we could only arouse all his warmth, enthusiasm, inspiration: the beautiful and the heroic, his laughter, too! All his childlikeness, playfulness, all the rhythm of his body and mind! Modern painters talk of the mechanics of the human body, as if man were a thing of steel, working on hinges: cold and bloodless. . . .

"People are puzzled by my masks . . . and masks, by the way, are only a small part of my work. What are my masks, after all? Everything has degenerated, even men's idea of the mask. A mask is now commonly regarded as something for concealing one's feelings, for duping people. Actually, a mask is intended to reveal what is deepest and truest. I am not thinking of the individual, but of qualities in the individual common to the race. In my masks I have tried to reveal, to bring to the surface, all that men have forgotten, that noble spark I spoke of, that fine, audacious human soul, the soul which at least two great men in our own time have seen and recognised. I mean Walt Whitman and Nietzsche. Nor does it matter that one speaks of democracy, the other of aristocracy, which, at their best, are one and the same thing, and meet even as the East and the West meet. Only beauty, a balanced, harmonious existence, and a recognition of this beauty in men asserting their creative spirit can save us from disaster. But humanity has become like the Gadarene swine, possessed by an evil spirit, and dashing on to destruction. . . . When you do not create, you destroy. . . . All the nations are arming. Especially Germany, where the mechanical spirit

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is in its apotheosis. . . . Have you seen that wonderful old gun in the Museum at Florence?"

"Yes, I have spent fifteen minutes admiring it, wondering why men took so much trouble to make an instrument of death beautiful," replied Gombarov.

"Precisely! Can't you see that a people that will take so much trouble to cover a gun with such magnificent designs cannot possibly take an equal interest in its death-dealing effectiveness. Well, a year ago, I happened to be at Essen, and saw part of the plant. Thousands upon thousands of guns are being turned out there, grim, stark-looking mechanisms, which have but one object, to kill! One day they are bound to go off. . . ."

"May I see some of your masks?" asked Gombarov.

Mr. Saville led the way to a corner of the room, the walls of which were covered with masks, some in variegated tones, others in red and gold, still others in silver and grey, a few in monochrome. Both sexes and all ages were to be seen here, beautiful Mirandas, pensive philosophers, adorable boys, tragic actors and laughing comedians.

"What a lovely infant's head!" Gombarov could not help exclaiming.

"Oh, that one! Let me take it down and put it by itself. To be seen properly, each mask should be by itself." Mr. Saville took it down and attached it against a plain canvas background in a wide frame.

"This infant surely had Aphrodite for its mother," said Gombarov.

"We'd better not discuss the father," laughed Mr. Saville. "Aphrodite, as you know, was not the most faithful of wives. That is the way with beauty, which is the greatest wisdom



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and loves experiment, to perpetuate itself in an infinite variety of combinations.”

“Has this mask any especial significance?”

“In one sense, no. I have merely tried to create a beautiful child, though, it is true, I have catalogued it as ‘An Infant’s Head to be Kept in the Chamber of a Woman in Pregnancy.’ Few realise the power of auto-suggestion in art. The bad art in suburban homes today helps to beget suburbanites. After all, there’s nothing like implanting the spark of beauty while the child is yet in its mother’s womb. And it’s more sensible to have a thing like that in a bedroom than the sort of thing you see, ‘I Need Thee Every Hour,’ ‘God Give Me Strength,’ ‘Abide in Me,’ and what not.”

Mr. Saville laughed a child-like laugh. “Now here is a different sort of mask,” he went on, as he replaced the child’s head with that of a youth. “What do you think of that?”

“I think,” said Gombarov, slowly, after pondering a while, “that this face is the very soul of courage and determination. If I look at it for some time, it affects me strangely. There is something infectious, I should say, hypnotic, about it. I can imagine having it constantly in my room, and growing to look and to feel like it. . . .”

“You *are* clever to see all that,” said Mr. Saville. “But you are quite right. I had intended to pour into this mask the very essence of will. An idea takes hold of a man, possesses him utterly. Such a possession implies faith, love—if you like. They are one and the same thing. Faith is love. Faith is strength, courage, will. Every true work of creation is an act of faith. All that I have tried to put into this mask. And if it contains all this, then it must surely speak to others. For love is power, and seeks to perpetuate itself through others. . . .”



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"Those are actors' masks," went on Mr. Saville, noticing that his visitor's eyes had strayed towards a group of masks, somewhat apart from the others. "People today, seduced by Realism, object to actors wearing masks. Of course, the actors themselves object to it. They want to display their personal pettinesses and individual idiosyncrasies, at the expense of the god in them, whom they set at defiance. They want to be important, our actors and actresses. They want to show how changeable they can be, the number of changing expressions of which they are capable. But they are not capable of a single eternal expression, which would stamp them as gods, or as instruments of the gods' will. A mask is an arrested expression. And as such it is at the same time an arresting expression. In a play written for masks, you would be so fascinated, so held by their single, inexorable, changeless expression, that their grandeur would fix an ineradicable imprint on your memory . . . as of some grand and impressive religious ceremony. But today we are making the most of our pettinesses, we are breaking up into pieces. . . ."

He made a helpless gesture, and during the pause children's footsteps were heard on the stairs, the door burst open, and two beautiful children came rushing into the room. One was a boy of about eight, the other a girl of about seven.

"Daddy!" they exclaimed together; then, on seeing Gombarov, stopped short.

"Here is a very nice man I want you to meet," said Mr. Saville, and they came forward with outstretched hands. "This is Richard Saville, and this is Miss Audrey. Now, children, run away and tell mother to send up tea for two!"

Gombarov was thinking: "This man practices what he preaches. He is a kind of artistic Midas, and all that he



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touches becomes beautiful. What beautiful children! Works of art, surely!"

Presently, the maid came in with tea and cakes, and the conversation became more personal. Mr. Saville was now the interviewer, Gombarov the interviewed. Gombarov was astonished that the great man should take an interest in his plans and doings.

After tea Gombarov rose to go, and thanked his host profusely for his kindness.

"Nonsense!" laughed Mr. Saville. "Come round tomorrow, if you have nothing better to do, and have lunch with Mrs. Saville and me."

"I should be only too happy, but may I make a condition?" said Gombarov, growing bolder.

"What is it?"

"That you and Mrs. Saville lunch with me the day after, or the first day that you are free."

"Righto!" said Mr. Saville. "I have no lunch engagement the day after tomorrow."

Gombarov left in a state of exultation, and as always, when greatly moved, paced the streets for hours.

GENIUS AS MERCHANT

If any one were asked to name the first six literary celebrities of London, there could be no question that Horace Juniper would be one of the six. Some persons, indeed, placed Juniper above Drill as an artist.

Juniper was not interested in machines. But he was intensely interested in people who worked at machines. There were few idlers in the community which populated Juniper's novels. The chief fact about his people was that they worked. They lived by clocks, they watched the hands of clocks, they

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obeyed clocks. None of your idling away of valuable hours in some candle-lit cellar or wretched attic over *sakuska* and *vodka* and *samovars*, in high-falutin' talk on man, Christ, God and devil. None of your wasting away your hours in plotting to kill some miserable old money-lending woman, who is after all no more than a human louse, in order to show yourself a petty Napoleon among petty men; then, after the deed has been done, to seek consolation in the company of a prostitute, making a goddess of her! None of your morbid pathology about people who didn't have sense enough to get out of the wet; who, if they did have sense enough to get out of the wet, did so only to get into some smoky café or public house, where by turns they talked philosophy and grew maudlin with some total, but not teetotal, stranger. As for "getting on," that was their very last thought. Juniper's people had sense enough to get out of the wet and stay out of the wet, except for the brief interval which they spent in going from their little suburban homes to the factory or shop and back to their little suburban homes again. Then, you may be sure, they had their umbrellas with them. Juniper's were a diligent people, and their one common aim in life was to "get on," "carry on." They worked in shops or at machines, and kept their eyes on the clocks. That week Mabel could afford the camisole she wanted; that week Harry would have enough saved up for an engagement ring. By the time Mabel got her trousseau together and Harry had enough money for a wedding ring, their affair was ripe for a breach of promise, and poor fickle Harry was faced with the prospect of having to pay damages or being miserable for life. If he was clever, he could manage to escape, of course! And some of Juniper's characters were decidedly clever. They not only managed to escape, but to get a rich girl in the bargain! The

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admirers of Juniper's books would smack their lips, and say: "There's a clever chap! There's realism for you!"

There could be no question that Juniper wrote brilliantly and convincingly of these things. His writings were, in their way, epics of the bourgeoisie. After all, every author deals with the environment and material he knows best. That he should, in the course of the process of creation, unconsciously emulate his own heroes, in a greater or lesser degree, is one of the penalties of an artist's life. For, according to all accounts and the author's own confessions, he had solved the secret of material success in literature. Juniper had solved the artist's economic problem. Perhaps, he himself had not realised how effectually he had solved it. He had made a heroic gesture with one or two fine books he had written; he had shaken his fist in the face of the shopkeepers, then reconsidered, for he saw a way of conquering them, though it involved turning shopkeeper himself. He would become a shopkeeper of literature. He would convert his brain into a machine for the turning out of a variety of wares wanted by publishers and editors. He would stand at the counter and attend to customers.

"What can I do for you? . . . A serial story? Certainly. When do you want it? . . . By the end of the month? I am sorry. I have too many orders in hand. The middle of next month is the best I can do. I can promise it, without fail. . . . All right, you shall have it. . . . Terms? You know my terms, but I shall have to charge overtime, since it's an express order. Thank you. Good day!"

"Good morning, Mr. Editor. What can I do for you this morning? . . . Two short stories . . . five thousand words each Yes, I just happen to have two in stock. You don't mind one of them being just a little overweight . . . a

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little matter of five hundred words or so? Yes, they are quite fresh. Only finished them yesterday . . . Shall I have them sent, or will you take them with you? . . . Very well, you shall have them by the first post. Thank you. Good day!"

"Good morning, Mr. Theatrical Manager. And what can I do for you? . . . A play in three acts? And a curtain raiser? Certainly. Who's the leading lady? . . . Ah, Miss Lily Fairblossom. . . . Yes, I have her measure here . . . and I know the goods she likes . . . plenty of emotional situations, a climax or two, and a touch here and there of light comedy trimming. . . . I have the very thing in mind for her. In a day or two I can give you estimates. A big job, of course! You can have it in six or seven weeks at the earliest. And I'm afraid I must ask for an advance. Yes, it's been a busy season in all lines. . . . You can have the scenario, sir, the day after tomorrow, say at four o'clock sharp. Thank you. Good day!"

In some such series of imaginary colloquies one might contrive to get at the theory formulated in Juniper's audacious brain, which was a brain made up, as it were, of a number of brains, each efficient in its own way, and one and all so organised as to be businesslike in a business world. He was, however, too consummate a craftsman wholly to abandon the world of artistic masterpieces; and if one may carry the analogy further, he was like one of those shopkeepers, not so rare as may be supposed, who keep one little room, one little corner, at the back of their shop, inviolate of commerce. Juniper, too, it may be assumed, had one such little corner, where he worked sometimes at the things he liked, where he kept the few things he loved, his dreams and the promise of all that he might have been in a world constituted differently from ours.

Gombarov could not screw up his courage to visit a man

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who was so obviously busy, and his several visits to Mr. Saville's house had something to do with his hesitation. Here he was always welcome to a frugal meal, here he listened to a great man who had surrendered nothing to commerce, here he whiled away some of his time in playing with the children. His mind opened of itself to Mr. Saville's ideas. . . .

MERCHANT AS GENIUS

The next name on Gombarov's list of great men was that of Mordecai Shipton, celebrated as a shop-keeper with an imagination, who, all were agreed, if he were not a shop-keeper, but an author, would have won renown equal to that of Balzac.

Shipton had one of the biggest emporia in London, and if rumours were to be believed he employed some of the best authors of the day to write his advertisements. No one doubted Shipton's genius, not even Mr. Saville. The latter had one day conceived the idea that Shipton was the very man to open up a department for his masks. "This man Shipton has imagination!" he said. So the artist sought the patronage of the Prince of Commerce, who granted him an audience. They lunched together, and Saville broached his project with all the enthusiasm of a boy. Shipton was genial and courteous, but could do nothing for Saville. He said that his shop, huge as it was, was overcrowded, and that the women's underwear department was especially in need of expansion. Some day he hoped to build a new wing and he might be willing then to consider the masks. But the lunch was good, and they were charmed with one another.

An interview with Shipton presented some difficulties. What should he interview him about? One day he picked up a newspaper and, glancing at the Shipton advertisement, exclaimed:

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"The very thing!"

The advertisement consisted of *obiter dicta* on Modern Business. After some preliminary remarks to the effect that "business makes the world go round" and that "business is no longer merely business," it proceeded with some categorical observations:

BUSINESS IS

Knowledge: Because no man may do business without a knowledge of men and women, without keeping in touch with public opinion, public taste, public psychology.

Pleasure: Because no salesman but feels pleasure in selling things he has confidence in, no customer but feels pleased in getting full value for his money.

The Golden Rule: Because a good business man treats his customers as he would himself be treated.

Faith: Because the honest business man inspires the confidence of his customers.

Kindness: Because to give employment is better than to give charity.

Integrity: Because honesty in business is the best policy. It pays and sets a good example to others.

Sociability: Because without courtesy no business may be done. It teaches self-control, tact, and inspires with a desire to please.

Development: Because good business encourages the customer to come back; that means growth, accumulation.

Morality: Because six days a week the business man sets an example to the community in honesty, efficiency, courtesy, and on the seventh he rests.

Civilization: Because the true business man is a servant of the community, encouraging civic progress, comfort, improvement of streets, the election of men who will work for the prosperity of the community.

Patriotism: Because a nation's honour rests on the reputation of its business men.



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Genius: Because all the best men today go into business. They are a nation's best asset. Without them Civilisation would fall.

Gombarov read this panegyric with some astonishment. Surely, the world must have changed since Goethe's day, for it was Goethe who said that war, trade and piracy were on a par. Ah, thought Gombarov, he would beard the great Shipton in his den, and put the question of the new morality squarely to him. If all that was true, then something had occurred in the world's history but little short of a revolution. It would make an exciting, above all, a provocative article, and he might be able to dispose of it to some American newspaper syndicate for a goodly sum. He was infected with the prospect of making money.

One day he screwed up sufficient courage to enter Shipton's Emporium, armed with an introduction from Mr. Saville. That particular entrance led him through the millinery department, which was full of women. Shyly he ran the gauntlet of these women and hoped that he would soon strike a masculine department, or at all events, a neuter one. Actually he was jumping from the frying-pan into the fire, for the next door brought him to the women's underwear department, which, owing to a "sale" being in progress, was so full of women, that once caught in the maelstrom he could neither go ahead at more than a snail's pace nor retreat. The best he could do was just to shuffle along.

Whiteness dominated the large room, a riot of whiteness, of white frailty, dazzling to masculine eyes. Fluffs, flounces, ruffles, interspersed with coloured ribbons and fragments of lace, spread out on counters or hanging from stands, or handled by women's hands; dummy female torsos attired in white soft things and dummy female legs in silk stockings with

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variegated ribbon garters above the knees. If he shut his eyes, it was worse. He felt himself smothered under a mountain of women's underclothes, while all around him was this crush of women, the penetrating, overpowering sense and odour of women, which streamed up his nostrils and made his head go round, and for some unaccountable reason evoked in his mind the image of Rubens's *Rape of the Sabines*, at the National Gallery. Goodness alone knew why of all pictures he should have thought of that one. But there it was: he thought of Rubens's *Rape of the Sabines*. Nor would the thought leave him. He emerged at last from that extraordinary room, or series of rooms, and found himself in the confectionery department.

"Whew!" he said to himself, drawing a deep breath; then turned to the shop-walker: "Where is Mr. Shipton's office, please?"

"Take the lift at the end, to the left, and go to the top floor. They'll direct you there."

He followed the direction indicated and entered the lift. Once in the lift, he felt he could not see Mr. Shipton. He was too much shaken and unnerved from the experience he had just undergone. The lift was emptied of all but himself by the time it reached the third floor, and the lift-man turned to him and asked:

"What floor, sir?"

"I don't know," replied Gombarov, falteringly. "I w-want a-a—bird-cage. . . ." A bird-cage was the first thing he could think of. Why, precisely, a bird-cage? Here was a riddle for the psychoanalysts.

"You are in the wrong lift, sir!" said the lift-man. "You should have taken the lift to the right, going to the basement."



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Gombarov thought he detected a sneer in the liftman's voice.

He found his way out into the street, and what a breath he took, deep-drawn and full of relief! That was unfortunate, as at that instant a taxi-cab standing near the kerb was emitting a thick cloud of petrol smoke, and Gombarov got the full benefit of it.

BACK-TO-NATURE ADVOCATE

The next great man on Gombarov's list was the picturesque John Weightly, who advocated new land laws, which would make possible the depopulation of large industrial cities and the return to farm life. He wanted a new Merrie England, with plenty of pubs, and wenches and swains dancing on the green. He was the enemy of all current fads, whether scientific, social or religious, and wrote amusingly against woman suffrage, eugenics, prohibition, science and "other contemporary superstitions." He was for ancient guilds as against Capitalism and preached universal brotherhood by the door of Catholicism, over which he inscribed: "All hope abandon, ye who enter not here!" This did not prevent him from writing for a Socialist newspaper, as he ascribed all the hated ills and fads not only to irreligion, but also to the twin partnership of Science and Capitalism. To Gombarov he explained his writing for the *Red Standard* by the statement that "that paper took in all sorts of lunatics!"

Mr. Weightly came up from the country to lunch with him in a Soho restaurant. Gombarov found some difficulty in understanding the utterances of the Falstaffian figure sitting opposite him, as Mr. Weightly had a way of filling his mouth with food and wine and talking and chuckling through it.

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He was palpably excited at the mention of the word, eugenics. "This cult," he exclaimed indignantly, "would institute a tyranny worse than the tyranny of kings, a fanaticism more frenzied than that of any religion. Kings, at all events, declared the principles on which they conducted their tyranny, and when on the rack of the Inquisition you could at least sing out when you were converted. But no one knows the principles on which the science of eugenics is conducted, and when on the rack of scientific tyranny you are likely to fall into the grievous error of declaring your agreement with the opinion which science held last week."

"You can't be an expert on normality! I should say, you can be thoroughly ignorant of abnormality!" Mr. Weightly emphasised this statement by savagely crushing a roll with his left hand against his chest. "This modern mania for specialisation is in itself an abnormality; to be logical in his mania, a eugenicist must assume a superiority, must indeed develop megalomania. Our first parents, healthy though one must assume them to have been, experienced the first shock of uncertainty when they gave birth to Cain, just as a good many sensible people must have experienced a similar shock in giving birth to a eugenicist. There is, at all events, something to be said for Cain, who killed his brother in the heat of passion; but the eugenicist would kill the unborn in the absence of passion. By cold calculation, a sacrifice on the altar of science. A doctor's conscience does not permit him to put a hopelessly ill, dying man out of his pain; yet a eugenicist's lack of conscience would allow him to put young men and women, with life before them, out of their joy. Had the laws formulated by the eugenicists been in force in the past, Galileo and other great benefactors of mankind would not have been



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born, as eugenic laws would have debarred their parents from marrying. A great responsibility devolves upon men who wish that Keats and Stevenson and Poe had never been born. And yet Keats got more happiness out of his short life than the majority of eugenic doctors in ninety-nine years. And Stevenson died at forty-four, happy and having made the world happier.

"The worst of it is that the capitalists, with their shibboleth of efficiency, are, perhaps unconsciously, on the side of the eugenists, and they would use eugenist laws in establishing a system of servitude. They would send a doctor round to tell a woman that she might marry Harry Jones but not Tom Jenkins. Now, a woman may marry a man who bets on horses and drinks beer and still be proud of him, while the capitalists think it a pity that she has tied herself up with a non-working man. Thus, the eugenic science would become a capitalist measure against the independence of the poor, and the Englishman's home would become a dungeon in the rich man's castle. . . ."

Thus Mr. Weightly went on, denouncing the modernists, and wound up before parting with a startling prophecy:

"What of the unrest in politics and literature? . . . Well, it's not unlikely that a war may come along and settle hundreds of things. If war does come, woman suffrage will be swallowed up as in an earthquake. When a woman shall see men go to war, she will say: 'I do respect men. How fine and brave and noble they are!' The worst of this demanding the vote is that you somehow imply that everyone is happy who has a vote. . . ."

Gombarov saw the apostle of Medievalism into a taxi. Taxis were a great weakness of Mr. Weightly's.

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BRAIN IN THE FOG

The same October week that he had his strange meeting with Lina Linter, Gombarov had another extraordinary experience. It was an evening of thick fog, and he and Julius were walking from Knightsbridge along the railed barrier of Hyde Park towards Albert Hall, where the literary celebrity, Mr. F. O'Flaherty Desmond, was to speak on *The Crime of Poverty*. He had the reputation of being an amusing, paradoxical speaker, who provoked many laughs on the most solemn subjects. By a stroke of luck Julius had secured two box seats.

The rail-barrier of Hyde Park stretched on at their side like some eternal penance. Little else was visible, and there appeared to be no end to it, but the penance was a sweet torment, and it did not matter if the end did not come. Voices and laughter came out of the fog, with edges as blurred as of the shadows that darted past. A 'bus crawled along the kerb, and the conductor walked by its side with a lantern in his hand. Now the foliage of a large tree spread overhead and became an exquisite lace in varying degrees of silver and grey tones; now an electric light loomed just ahead, a large, luminous orange, very high up, suspended as if it were a planet, without visible support—a strange, unaccountable phenomenon, reappearing at intervals. The fog, not equally thick, was as a dark veil, worn in places, and through its rifts London's complexion glowed and her jewels dimly shone, renewing her mystery and seductiveness so irresistible to her unwearying lovers. For who, once having loved her, has ceased loving her? Who, once conscious of her fascination, has been able to free himself? Under this dark veil the personality of London was felt as at no other



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time. One felt her closeness, the wonder of her past, the hovering of the spirits of her lovers of aforetime, and she was the more lovely for having been loved before. Oh, London, London! Oh, old; oh young! Oh, cruel; oh, kind! Oh, ugly; oh, beautiful! Who are you? What are you? Who conceived you? Who gave you your name, with its sound of bells, dinning, high and low?

But there, across the way, what was it, that tiny oasis of green and red light, emerald and ruby? It was the window of a chemist's shop. This spot, before which muffled figures passed and passed, was as beautiful as a dream.

"That means we have passed Albert Hall!" said Julius. "Let's cross the street and walk back."

A crowd was pouring through the entrances of the large rotund structure. There were some queer looking people to be seen, obviously intellectuals, young men with long hair, young women with short. There were many pale faces in the corridor, such as Gombarov had seen at a vegetarian restaurant, faces with gleaming, consumptive eyes, which refused to look upon beef when it was red. Two "arty" women wore curiously cut green frocks with Greek borders; their stockingless feet were shod in sandals.

The two friends soon found their box in the hall. There was a rising and falling of voices, now and then a flurry of applause or a stamping of feet, as the crowd near the platform recognised a new arrival among the speakers, of whom not so much as a shadow was visible from where Gombarov sat. This was due to the hall being full of fog, which hung in clouds, or drifted, thickly, like tobacco smoke, lit up and interpenetrated with shafts of light, emanating from the lustres in the centre and the arc lights circling the amphitheatre. Groups of faces were to be seen in the immediate neighbour-

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hood, in the curve to the right and to the left, and in the balcony just overhead; these were blurred and veiled, and merged into a vast texture of pale spots, quite indistinguishable in feature one from the other, or even man from woman. Snatches of revolutionary songs were heard from various parts of the immense hall, and staccato effects were supplied at intervals by isolated or grouped coughers.

At the sudden loud rap of an invisible mallet the great crowd grew silent. An invisible chairman introduced an invisible speaker, who was greeted with applause from thousands of invisible auditors. The speaker, a Socialist, fired hard, explosive words through the fog, which he likened to the fumes of capitalism hanging over the people, choking them, smothering them, and only waiting to be dispersed by a little breeze. That breeze was socialism. "If it were only a hurricane!" he exclaimed, to the accompaniment of "Hear! Hear!" from the audience and of the coughing and cleansing of many throats.

"Abolish capitalism, and you abolish poverty!" he went on. "You have the power, if you only will, to generate the breeze, nay, the hurricane, to sweep away the fog of capitalism. The chains that hold you are but your own sloth. You yourselves are that hurricane, if you only knew it! In all parts of the earth the sleeping winds are awakening, and together they shall sweep the earth clear of the fog and miasma of the old order. We Britons must join hands with our brothers in France, Germany, Austro-Hungary, America and Russia. There is no patriotism, only the International. We shall scrap all armies and navies, and do away with all the parasites who live on the sterile labour of the thousands forging weapons of destruction, and the same labour and the same wealth shall go to the making of comfortable homes, education, sanitation, health. . . ."



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The fog in the hall deepened. The neighbouring faces became less and less visible. Discomfited throats continued coughing. The speaker went on, and it seemed as if he had gained confidence from seeing no one, and was addressing his speech, full of defiance, to the fog, to the whole world. . . . When he sat down, the applause did not come at once, as no one was quite sure that he had sat down, but when it came it was like a dam bursting. . . .

Again a hard rap from the mallet, followed by a silence. A new speaker was introduced, this time a woman. . . . The soft, warm tones of a feminine voice came drifting, and it seemed as if they were further softened and warmed by commingling with the thick, smoky air. There was a caress in that voice, and no hard edges. It was seductive and rich with the quality of its owner's sex, and because of the speaker's invisibility it was easy to imagine it as coming from the other side of a screen or partition, from under a coverlet of eider-down. There was a vibrancy in it, modulated at first, gradually developing volume, rising to passion, with little outbursts of hysteria, normal to modern women, so pleasant to the susceptible ears of modern men. Women's voices affected Gombarov curiously. . . . This one aroused his tenderness, unaccountably awakened the male in him. Now it came as a pleading for a lover, now as a mother appealing for her little ones. There was in it a refined primitivity. . . . "What a tigress! What a lover!" said Gombarov to himself, and suddenly became angry with himself for not paying proper attention to what the lady had to say. But that was a way with him: some music and some voices acted strangely on him. He caught at sounds, sounds had a special meaning for him, and what the sounds said to him was not always what the words said. Meanwhile the voice rose and rose, grew more

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and more vibrant, now deep, now shrill, overreaching itself now and again on a top-note, which appeared to break and scatter into a series of faint little shrieks. As she was reaching the crescendo of her speech, there was a sense of effort, a sense of panting, a sense of sudden rising to dizzy heights, then a prolonged note bordering on a sob, broken as if its utterer had swooned away. . . . An intense silence of some moments followed, then the crowd, held breathless by the speaker, broke loose in a thunder of applause.

Again a sharp rap of the mallet, and the chairman was "pleased to introduce Mr. F. O'Flaherty Desmond, who needed no introduction." And sharply, out of the fog, there came the clear, deliberate, business-like tones of Mr. Desmond's voice, which, in contrast to the previous speaker's, was wholly dispassionate, with a touch of mockery. A rapier, it cut boldly through the fog, and its edge remained unsoftened and unblurred. The woman's voice had been in that fog a flaming torch, flickering, flaring, wavering, it had the warmth that comes with the consummation of a passion. Mr. Desmond's was cold and electrical, even and balanced, quite ruthless and unchanging, a searchlight of so much horsepower, incapable of increasing or decreasing its volume of light. This voice, too, had its effect on Gombarov, if of a different sort. It did not appear to come from a human being, visible or invisible, but from a brain, quite separate and detached, suspended in space there, without visible support, like those luminous electric oranges outside, and this suspended brain was speaking in metallic, cerebral tones its hard logic, in terms of banter and irony. Horace Walpole's observation crossed Gombarov's brain as he listened to Desmond's voice: "Life is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel."

"In this fog," began Mr. Desmond, "I feel as Jehovah must

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have felt when he uttered his laws from the smoke of Mount Sinai. For I warn you, ladies and gentlemen, that like Jehovah I shall stand no nonsense from you. I have caught you dancing round the golden calf. But that is not what I have against you. What I have against you is that you haven't danced round the golden calf quite enough! I should like every one present here to possess a golden calf of his own. My quarrel with you is that you are not capitalists. I should like to see every man a capitalist. It is the duty of every man to be a capitalist. I am a capitalist myself. I want to see no man poor, as I want to see no man a thief or a murderer. Poverty is the most prevalent crime of the age, and it is not a whit less serious than petty larceny. Our system today recognises that. A man who steals a loaf of bread goes to jail, but a man who steals a million pounds or so of sterling out of the pockets of his fellowmen is considered to be a clever fellow and not only is allowed to go scot free, but is patted on the back for it and allowed to have a palace, a dozen servants and a Rolls-Royce. My sympathies are all, naturally, with the idle rich as against the pregnant poor. Poor fellows! You can have no idea what a plague idleness can be! Besides, the poor devils must be always thinking of finding jobs for you. You will breed so! There has been nothing like it from Methuselah to Malthus! There are so many of you. They can't possibly provide for you all. . . . I am a capitalist myself, and so I know. I get my publishers to charge you as much as possible for my books. I get the theatre managers to charge you as much as possible for seats for my plays. Now if you were wise—God forbid!—you would, looking at it from your point of view, nationalise me. What I mean is, you'd come to me, and you'd say: 'Look here, old duffer. We like you, and we adore your novels and plays. Shakespeare can't

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hold a candle to you, and Molière has to take a back seat. We don't hold that up against you, your being born so clever. Still, we don't think it right that you should gather in all our shekels. Tell you what we'll do. We'll build you a theatre. We shall, of course, name it after you. We will also give you a house rent free, and all the necessities of life, such as bread and ink, and we'll see that you don't die in the poor-house, and that you have a decent funeral with lots of flowers, and a tombstone to say what a splendid fellow you were. . . . In any case, it's an ultimatum.' I'd make a wry face and be sure to sulk for a while. In the end I should have to cave in, and thank you with Chinese politeness. And you? You'd be getting my splendid productions practically for nothing, and their cost being taken out in taxes, you'd have the pleasure of not knowing that you paid me anything. . . ."

In this fashion Desmond went on castigating his audience, which judging from frequent laughter and applause, appeared to enjoy being flouted. The voice proceeded to speak of the inevitable with no more emotion than that of an oracle. "You are poor, ladies and gentlemen," the voice was saying, "in order that armies and navies may thrive. Your work is not creating real capital, but anti-capital. You are forging weapons of destruction. What are weapons of destruction for if not to destroy? Destroy whom? Germany? But Germany is our best customer. We are Germany's best customer. And so, even if we could destroy Germany, we should only be destroying ourselves. . . . Millions are being spent in all countries for destruction. Millions are being paid for battleships, which soon become obsolete . . . new inventions are constantly displacing the old and for every new weapon there is invented a counter-weapon. . . . And one day, they are bound to go off. . . . What then? . . ."



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Thus spoke that voice of the brain suspended in the fog, coldly, deliberately, metallically, and when it ceased there was applause. But who ever heard of an oracle being applauded? It was as if they applauded their own coming doom, as if it were a thing to be desired.

Gombarov and Julius walked out into the outer fog, without waiting to hear the other speakers.

"The most clear-thinking man in England!" said Julius. "He was, as you say, a cold brain speaking in the fog, but that fog, my boy, is an excellent symbol for England!"

TOAD-IN-THE-HOLE

Gombarov felt that his education in the matter of great men was incomplete without meeting a real, live Royal Academician. He went to see Sir Algernon Pengwynne, R.A.

Sir Algernon, an old gentleman with white beard, dignified and courteous, a trifle solemn, questioned Gombarov about his experiences in England, and asked him what he thought of the Post-Impressionists. Gombarov discreetly observed that he thought there was a touch of madness about them.

"I shouldn't call it exactly a touch!" exclaimed Sir Algernon. "They are fit for the lunatic asylum, that's what I say! The idea of grown-up people enjoying the benefits of civilisation wanting to paint like savages or children. Well, they've certainly succeeded, if that's what they want. Of course, you've heard of the joke played on these moderns in Paris! Some wag, it appears, got a donkey to stick its tail into a pot of paint, then got the donkey to work its tail over a canvas. The result was sent to the Modern Exhibition—and was accepted! A Post-Impressionist masterpiece! Ha! Ha!"

"Yes, I've heard the donkey story, but won't you let me see some of your work?"

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"You won't mind it not being painted by a donkey's tail?"

They passed through the library on the way to the studio. Here, in the musty atmosphere of books, Sir Algernon paused to expatiate on the value of books and learning to a great painter.

"I've designed the house myself," he said. "And I've purposely put the library here. I like to think that no man may take up the art of painting without knowing something about literature, especially the classics. I have three thousand volumes here, and I've read every one of them. . . . How can one paint Nero fiddling while Rome burned without knowing something about Nero's history and character and habits, and something about the current architecture and fashions? But those donkey Post-Impressionists think they can cast off all civilisation, paint how and what they like and call it what they like. They are mad! And the world is mad! I hear that some people actually buy their work. . . . Donkeys!"

The artist led the way into the studio, the sort of studio one would expect of a Royal Academician. The first canvas to strike Gombarov's eyes was a large, full length portrait of a handsome tall man in a very gaudy uniform. Sprawling across the top of the canvas, in large Roman letters, was: "The Duke of —, K.G., K.T., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O."

"The Duke has received another title since I've painted that, and I shall have to do the lettering all over again to get it in," said the painter. "Let me show you one of my abstract subjects, 'Aphrodite Rising from the Sea'."

Gombarov looked at the picture, which showed a naked, obviously English girl, with flowing fair hair, standing rather shyly, knee-deep in the sea.

"I had some difficulty in getting the model to stay in the water any stretch of time," said the artist. "She is a good

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girl, but a bit shy outdoors. I believe in drawing from models. Here is my latest picture, 'The Afternoon Call'."

Sir Algernon pointed to a canvas on an easel that showed a Louis Quatorze room and a handsomely attired gentleman of the period bowing to a young lady, who was sitting in a chair.

"This picture," said the artist, "will give you some idea of how I work. I have been at it for some weeks now. Painting a picture is not so simple a thing as those modern donkeys imagine. Here are some of my original designs. He picked up a pile of drawings from the table. "As you see, I have drawn the gentleman and the lady quite separately at first, and absolutely naked. That was to get my anatomy correct. It wasn't until I got them just as I wanted them that I put clothes on them. . . ."

Gombarov could not resist smiling, but refrained from asking the question that was on his lips: Did Sir Algernon put their clothes on piece by piece? . . .

"The costumes are all historically correct," went on the painter. "Now, look at the picture on the wall. I mean the picture in the picture," he added, as he saw his visitor's eyes stray elsewhere. "It was my original intention to invent a design to represent a picture of the period, but on second thought it occurred to me that I couldn't do better than insert the real thing. That's a picture by Watteau. I first copied it in the Louvre full-size. Then I took it home and painted a copy in miniature. There's no use inventing when you can get the real thing, is there? The original colours are all there, too! And now look at the pattern of the parquet floor, also of the period. As you can see, it's a simple enough pattern, but there's the question of perspective. I have that mathematically correct. Just look at these!" and he drew out a number of blue prints of meticulous workmanship.

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"Certainly," thought Gombarov, "if genius is the art of taking pains, this man is a genius, but——"

". . . It was a toss-up," Sir Algernon's voice was saying, "whether I should be an engineer or a painter. This perspective design is a result of my having studied engineering for a while, and I do not regret it. It used to be said that a little learning is a dangerous thing, and now these young modern donkeys would have it that a lot of learning is a dangerous thing. . . ."

"What made you take to painting?" asked Gombarov.

"Ah, young man, thereby hangs a tale," replied Sir Algernon, his expression softening. "My little wife, God bless her, decided that. She saw my talents, and urged me on. That was before I married her. And I never regretted it!"

Gombarov couldn't quite make out whether he never regretted having taken up painting or having married his little wife.

Then his host again burst into abuse of modern painters. "Notoriety seekers, nothing else! . . . They talk of youth knocking on the door. Bah! I don't call it knocking, but thumping! thumping! thumping! They want to break into the Palace of Art with an axe! Thumping is what I call it, young man, thumping, thumping! . . ."



CHAPTER VI: THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

"Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key . . . Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' the name of Beelzebub? . . . Knock, knock! Who's there, i' the other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven: O! come in equivocator . . . Knock, knock, knock! . . ."

—MACBETH.

GHOST-SEEKER

AFTER being admitted by Tobias Bagg's landlady, Gombarov ascended two flights of rickety stairs and knocked on the door of the poet's wretched little room, and waited. There was no answer, but he could hear the click of the typewriter within. He knocked again, this time louder, which brought forth the vigorous response, "Come in!"

He entered and found Tobias in his shirt-sleeves. He was sitting with his back to the door, his face toward the window, which looked out on an old graveyard. He did not turn at once, but went on banging away at the typewriter. His long fair hair, which even in repose stood up on end, swayed responsively to the movement of his fingers, reminding one of a pianist.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, pausing suddenly, as he wheeled round in his seat. He fixed his blue eyes on the visitor and

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smiled mischievously, while one hand clutched his blonde beard. His hair stood up bristling and erect, and Gombarov remembered that someone had called him a "sun god."

"Do sit down, Gombarov," said Bagg in a somewhat shrill, twangy voice, unmistakably American. "I was just doing a two-hundred-and-forty-line poem, to show that it can't be done! That isn't to say that it isn't better than the long poems being written nowadays, but if I and Patrick Raftery, the two best poets writing English today, can't write a decent long poem, who can? The best poems, I should say the only poems, are always short. Yet the old fogies, who represent the Royal Academy of poetry, go on producing poems by the yard, like merchandise! You can put that in the article you are writing about me, if you like. I've received my new portrait today, which you can use with it. Here it is. You can see, I've had it taken in my dressing-gown, which is a more esthetically satisfying garment than the banal bags we wear today. That'll make the New Yorkers sit up and take notice, what d'you think? And you might put in that I am using the royalties of my last book of poems, *Mutatis mutandis*, in having a Cubist necktie made to order at the Cubist Industries Shop. Am spending the whole cheque of seven shillings and sixpence on it."

"You don't mean to say that, with all your reputation, that is all you get for a book of poems!"

"That's only for the second six months. I've made as much as five pounds out of a book, which contained the best of several months' work. But you can't be a great poet and make money. If I once began to make money, I should ask myself: 'What's wrong with my work? In what way have I compromised with public taste? What have I done to gain the praise of Phineas Penwick?'"



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"I say, Bagg, and what's wrong with Penwick? He is counted by some as being England's best literary critic."

"Everything is wrong with him! He is dead! As a corpse he may be very beautiful. As a mummy in the British Museum, he'd look splendid. But the idea of his pontificating on literature! He's got no guts! To get a new idea out of him would require nothing short of a Cæsarian operation, and to get a new idea into his head would be as difficult as to walk through the great wall of China. In short, he's a fine specimen of English stodge, the Royal Academician in literature. What are you doing tonight, Gombarov?"

"Oh, nothing in particular! Why?"

"Meet me at the *Isola Bella* at eight. We can have dinner, then go along to Hugh Rodd's place, close by. Some of the best of the young poets will be there. We intend to launch a new poetic movement, and to discuss a new periodical, which I propose that we shall call 'I' or 'Myself.' Our idea, you see, is to encourage everyone to express himself in his own way, and to discourage schools and academies. We will expose the Art Trust! The periodical will be our first bomb against the old fogies, the art merchants. I shall put your name on the contributors' list, if you like. I am afraid we shan't be able to pay for contributions, not at first."

"Of course!" said Gombarov, flattered to be counted among the rebels. "Funny you should speak of it, for I've brought a little article along with me, that I should like you to look over. It happens to be against the Academy!"

While Bagg was reading the article, Gombarov sat by rather nervously. He regarded himself as a mere acolyte in literature, and he was never fully to recover from the nervousness he experienced in the presence of another reading a manuscript of his.

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

"The very thing!" he was relieved to hear Bagg say. "You know, you'll make a fine art critic. But you'll have to get away from inversions and *clichés*. You have a chance of succeeding Wilfred Suttle as the best English critic. Suttle, unfortunately, belonged to the 'nineties, when every decent artist was driven by society to go to the devil. One drowned himself, another shot himself, a third took to drink, two others to drugs, a sixth to the gutter, and so on. . . . Yes, you have a splendid sense of prose, much better than my own. . . ."

"Do you really think so?" asked Gombarov, flattered by this unexpected praise, though it was notorious that Bagg, a fine poet, wrote atrocious prose. Still, praise from Bagg was something of a compliment. Bagg was not a man given to admissions of his own inferiority. There was this to be said for him: within his limitations, he had a keen, critical mind, quick to detect flaws of technique.

Bagg was one of the first of that horde of Americans, of whom the forerunners were Henry James and Whistler, to invade Europe with the purpose of acquiring something out of the accumulated treasure of her culture. Gombarov called these the "ghost-seekers," for it seemed to him that they came to commune with old ghosts, to learn something in lands where hovered the spirits of the dead and the living great. It was something to know that here Shakespeare nursed his creative dreams, that here Rabelais let loose his cornucopia of world-shaking mirth, that here *dæmons* still lived and held forth. The first American messengers never returned to their native land, but became part and parcel of the old soils, to which they added something, while their seed was exported to America, a curious Americo-European quantity. Those, like Stuart Merrill and Vielé-Griffin, who went to France, were swallowed up by Europe, and their seed remained there. Such



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was the strength of Europe. It was not only Americans who intermingled with Europe, but the Europeans themselves intermingled more and more, the men of one nation with those of another. Before James and Whistler and Conrad, England and her arts had been, to all intents and purposes, English, or produced by Englishmen, but at the time Gombarov came to London, individuals of alien blood were making serious depredations on the native arts, and, in that sense, England had ceased being insular. The plastic arts, especially, were beginning to lose their national and local characteristics. And international Europe was drawing America more and more into its intellectual orbit.

Tobias Bagg was perhaps the first of the American invaders consciously to perceive this phenomenon. He preached a European culture for America, and having made London his home, he extended a welcome to any young American poet who came to the metropolis, and in spite of his poverty managed, somehow, to entertain him lavishly to dinner, and to introduce him to those whom he considered "the most interesting people." In this way he not only did a good turn to his culture-hunting countrymen, but also established his own importance. He was not without admirers in England, and apart from his friendships with such celebrities as the poet Raftery and the poet-critic-novelist, Rupert Hunt, he had two or three English disciples, in whom he took great pride and who shared with him his admirations and detestations. They were united in one common aim, which was to break the chains that held poetry to old forms, and they thought to restore youth to poetry by returning to primitive rhymeless forms. They called themselves the Primitivists, and though their idea was to write as if no one had written before them, yet they curiously argued that no one could write good English who

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was unacquainted with modern French masterpieces in the original.

Bagg himself was all art for art's sake, yet there was a Pauline, a Salvation Army, air about him—he was a convert maker, a drum-beater, a blower of fanfares, calling upon young artists, especially Americans, to join his group and be saved—from bad art! This aspect of him, this tendency to proselytise, was possibly due to his being a descendant of an old New England family, with aggressive Puritanic traditions, though actually he was born in Kansas, which doubtless accounted for his Yankee breeziness. Like most intelligent Americans who had stayed some time abroad, he was both a product and a reaction from forebears and environment. And in England he was more continental than English. The English critics received his first little book of poems with enthusiasm and prophesied wonderful things for its author. Actually, on the appearance of his second book, they raised a united chorus to say that “the author of *Reveille* had not lived up to the promise of his first book, *Ménéstralsie*. . .”

Bagg explained to Gombarov that “the English way was to pat a young writer on the head only to give him afterwards a stout kick from behind. Their first praise is like dressing up a man for his execution or his funeral. You are bound to write a book one day, and you will see!” He was bitter about the English attitude and harped on the treatment Whistler had received. Gombarov had the impression that Bagg regarded himself as the champion of good poetry in the same way that Whistler was the champion of good painting. There was, indeed, a curious resemblance in their methods of living and working. Both had come from a land of few ghosts, and they were defenceless against the army of ghosts which swooped down on them in lands of old culture, and took easy posses-

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sion of them. Whistler had communed with the ghosts of Velazquez and Hokusai, and even with that of Turner, whom he is said to have detested, possibly for the same reason that Bagg detested Whitman, for dealing with "cosmic forces," for not working within prescribed limitations, for letting his material over-run his frames, break his frames. That was why Bagg was doing a two-hundred-and-forty-line poem, to show that it couldn't be done—by him! Out of Velazquez, Hokusai and parts of Turner, Whistler, a man less than any of these, had performed an experiment in alchemy, had, indeed, achieved a new combination, all his own. Bagg had communed with the ghosts of England, China, Spain, Greece, Japan, France and Italy, but had not achieved an equal synthesis. He could do a poem in the style of an old English ballad, another in the style of Meleager, or of Li Po, or of Laforgue; but though an American, he could not write a poem that could be called American. Like America itself, he was a combination of alien, unassimilated, if sometimes beautiful fragments, striving to impenetrate one another, to fuse with one another, and succeeding only here and there, more or less. But he was unable to see America from a height, as an incessantly active chemical pattern, trying to stabilise itself.

He had a horror of the word "cosmic." But there was no getting around it: America *was* cosmic! It was chaos, a world in the making, a melting-pot, an appearance—if gazed at from a height—like one of Turner's mad paintings of a sunrise; the particulars were in the process of melting in order to assume eventually the shapes of different particulars. The Americans in Europe were thinking of the future of America and their idea was to accelerate the cooling processes by throwing into the pot a potent solution of older cultures. They

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wanted to see America "a finished product," a gentleman with manners and manicured finger-nails.

In the meantime some of America's escaping heat was infecting Europe. In Europe they were sick of being cultured gentlemen, and the "barbaric yawp" of Whitman was falling on responsive ears, especially in France, which was of the very essence of Europe, and out of France came the influence of Whitman to Americans in England, just as previously, in the 'nineties, out of France came the influence of the American Poe and gave rise to the English Symbolists, who, in their turn, sent to America a few spare crumbs, which America had refused at the source. The Atlantic had become a cultural billiard table. You struck a ball out of America and it shot in a straight line to France, went off at an angle to England, and back to America. Europe was Europeanising America, America was Americanising Europe. Like two interacting chemicals they were dissolving and fusing with one another in the arts as in the economic and social spheres.

One sometimes wondered whether Bagg was aware of having borrowed a couple of tricks from his spiritual enemy. For *vers libre* came to him presumably from France, actually from America, by way of France. Bagg preached revolt in poetry, but, then, Whitman before him had been a rebel, in practise. Bagg, who exercised an influence on young American poets, possibly imagined himself, perhaps, to be king of the chess-board, but to Gombarov it seemed that the Spirit of the Inevitable was using him as a pawn, an effective pawn to be sure, but one knows what happens to pawns, the best of them. Bagg, indeed, had come to that point in his career when he wrote less and less poetry and more and more manifestoes as to how poetry should be written. He was making disciples, and though his growing influence was appreciably felt among a

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small Anglo-American set in England, it was in America that the seed thus sown showed signs of fructifying on a large scale.

Gombarov first met him casually at Saville's one day, and they rapidly became friends. Nevertheless, Gombarov often felt constraint in his presence, which was not wholly due to shyness. There was Saville, the one unmistakably great man among the celebrities he had met, with whom he never felt constraint. He could tell Saville anything. Saville was a great artist and also a great man: for he created great art and at the same time lived abundantly. With Bagg it was difficult to discuss anything but art forms. Bagg's one topic was the technique of poetry, and Gombarov found that, on his part, he could make conversation by dragging in painting, of which Tobias knew little or nothing. In this way they learnt something from one another. It was to be said for Bagg that he was an eager listener to all matters appertaining to the technique of the arts, and was quick to put to use what he had learnt.

They seldom talked of life, or of art's relation to life. Whenever Gombarov touched on the subject, he found every approach barred. Bagg, with a superior air, hovered above it all, as if the matter were vulgar and did not concern him. Art to him was an abstract pattern, a sort of superior jig-saw puzzle, the arranging of words, colours or sounds in harmonious combinations, almost wholly independent of life. Life was a slut, a woman of easy virtue, and he had no use for her. The truth was that Bagg's experience of life was limited, and he made a virtue of his limitations. But Gombarov, who had seen something of life, and tasted of her bitterness, could not get away from the idea that the roots of art are in life, and in the abundance thereof, and that mere pattern making could never content him.

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This fundamental difference kept them fundamentally apart, precluded any idea Bagg may have entertained of Gombarov becoming a disciple, and raised up that wall of constraint between them.

Bagg was in good spirits when he met Gombarov at the *Isola Bella*. He was dressed in a black velvet coat, a grey-yellow velours hat and a purple flowing tie, and the buttons on his coat were of red glass.

"Here is the first shot of our campaign," he said, handing a letter to his vis-à-vis.

The letter was addressed to Laurence Winmill, Georgian poet, and was couched in the following terms:

"Dear Sir:—I have great pleasure in challenging you to a mortal duel for your incredible stupidity in thinking Wordsworth a poet and for imitating him. Yours faithfully, Tobias Bagg."

"What do you think of it?" said Bagg. "That will wake him up, eh? We will take them all by the shoulders, shake them, as they snooze in their comfortable chairs, and say to them: 'Wake up, England!'"

Gombarov smiled, but said nothing. He wanted to say "Don't you think, the best way to shake them up would be to write great poems?" He said instead: "Worthy of Whistler!"—an ambiguous remark, sure to please Bagg more than anything else he could say.

Tobias purred with pleasure. He was in his way a child, playful and malicious, and he took as great pleasure in a prank as in writing a poem. If Gombarov's supposition that he had modelled his career on Whistler's was correct, to say that he had done something "worthy of Whistler" was to give him the moon itself.

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"Take a look at these poems," said Bagg, "and tell me what you think of them. They came by post this morning."

Gombarov's eyes, as he opened the book, fell first of all on the flyleaf, with its inscription: "To the Master, the only Tobias Bagg, humbly, from Conrad Barron."

Gombarov smiled inwardly, and turned to the title page, which read: "NUPTIALS, by C. Barron, published by the Author." He turned over the page, and there was the dedication: "To all virgins waiting their hour, speedily, lest the wine turn into vinegar." There was an intriguing air about these preliminary pages, and Gombarov turned another page, to find a poem "To Amaryllis," in which it was related how the Poet had watched Amaryllis grow from bud to blossom, and from blossom to full bloom, until her

*"... flower-like face, dark-framed with wealth of hair,
More silken to the touch than pansy petals,
Gazed softly out of its eyes, tormented
With the up-flowing sap of passion, flooding
From the roots . . ."*

and how the Poet at last took pity and plucked the flower, much to the lady's edification and his own joy. The poem concluded:

*"And in that hour, Amaryllis,
I uncorked a fresh flask of wine,
To honour our mutual ecstasy.
What if I struggled with the cork! . . .
The wine was good."*

Variations on the theme were written also "To Helen," "To Phyllis," "To Juno," and other ladies with idyllic names.

"They seem to be all about free love," observed Gombarov, amused.

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"The important thing is that they are in free verse," said Bagg.

"Perhaps it is natural," observed Gombarov, "that free love should find expression in free verse. Great passion, as you have said, cannot completely express itself within the hide-bound laws of rhyme. Free love, of course, implies the breaking down or the surmounting of traditional laws, and such strength of passion in life often results, as we know, in the birth of extraordinary men, Da Vinci, to mention one, who said, 'I am a bastard, and am proud of it.' But both free love and free verse do follow natural, or, if you like, fundamental laws. . . ."

"Well, I never thought of that," said Bagg. "It's a good argument against conventional morality, which we know is bad. There is an idea for an article in it. You are not using it yourself, are you?"

"No. You are welcome to it!" replied Gombarov, amused that Bagg had taken him seriously, and wondering whether he had given away a good idea in a jest. "You don't believe in marriage for an artist, do you, Tobias?"

"Decidedly no. A wife is a coffin to an artist. You are not contemplating attending your own funeral, are you?"

Tobias grew thoughtful. A suspicion crossed Gombarov's mind that he was having an unhappy love affair.

"By the way," said Tobias, "you may meet the author of these poems to-night. I've sent him a wire to come to Rodd's. I think there's something in the boy. It's well to catch them young."

At that moment a young man entered and absent-mindedly looked round the room. Bagg beckoned to him.

"Sit down with us, if you are not expecting anyone else," said Bagg.

"I don't mind," replied the newcomer. "Sure I'm not in the



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way?" He had a gruff, drawling, somewhat arid voice. "I got your note about tonight," he added, as he sat down at the narrow end of the table between Bagg and Gombarov.

A PIONEER

"Roy Christopher of Chiptaw, Arizona—John Gombarov of Samovarski, Russia!" was Bagg's way of introducing them. Christopher looked curiously at Gombarov out of his grey eyes, which, three-quarters hid, peeped out of their long, narrow slits. Apparently, the mention of Russia awakened something in him, for a spark suddenly showed in his eyes, a gleam of response, which, achieving a rapid scrutiny of Gombarov, at once vanished.

"Do you know Russian?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Is it a hard language to learn? I should like to read Biely, Blok and Sologub in the original."

Gombarov was astonished, for he was better acquainted with the Russian classics than with contemporary names. Christopher, without looking at his listeners, went on talking about these new writers, concerning whom he had gleaned various facts from French and German periodicals. His eyes fixed in the distance, he went on talking as if he were reciting a monologue, wholly disregarding the waiter who had been standing by for some time waiting for the order.

"What will you have to eat?" Bagg interrupted him, and even while, in an undecided manner, Christopher was examining the menu, he now and then looked up and interjected a few remarks on Russian literature, which were uttered as by some reflex action in his brain.

"Côtelette Milanaise," he said at last, gruffly, and proceeded with some observations on Biely's book on *Symbolism*.

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From this he naturally diverged to the subject of modern French poetry, its technique and to an intricate exposition of various *vers libristes*.

He came down with an avalanche of French names, some of which, apparently, were foreign even to Bagg, who prided himself on his knowledge of modern French poets. During Christopher's talk he now and then noted down a name new to him.

Gombarov felt sad not to be able to join in with a remark, as he did not know French, and the subject of French poetry was obscure to him. In his insufficiency he felt bored. The man's voice went on monotonously; it was a dry, jagged, unrelenting voice, a voice from the prairies. But he found some interest in watching the man himself, with his lean, big-boned frame, his marked, tortured face, high cheek-bones, and high, broad forehead under a few wisps of thin brown hair; above all, those long, narrow eyes, whose glittering, liquid pupils slid back and forward in their slits like drops of mercury.

Then, somehow, the monologue digressed to the subject of ancient and modern painting, the arts of the Egyptians and the Aztecs, the Italian Primitives, then to Cezanne and Picasso, Van Gogh, Matisse and Gauguin. One remark found a response in Gombarov:

"The difference between Matisse and Gauguin," Christopher said, "is that one is a rebel against modern civilisation and is content to express his revolt entirely in his art; the other expressed it in his life as well, for he chucked his bourgeois family and went to Tahiti to live like a savage. A titan, if there ever was one!"

Christopher appeared to know everything. And it all poured out of him in a steady monotonous flow, yet with a sense of reluctance, as if the words were being squeezed out of



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him like paint out of a tube. Only an occasional remark by Bagg or Gombarov interrupted the flow. Gombarov did not then know that it was not due to any desire to display his knowledge, but came from sheer nervousness, and in his ignorance Gombarov resented it.

Christopher, in spite of his tormented, dour expression, had an extremely boyish look, and it was astonishing to hear him refer so casually to the extent of his travels. Though born and bred in Arizona he had, after studying at Harvard—an experience he apparently regretted—traversed Mexico, New Mexico, the States of the West and Southwest, had seen New Orleans, San Francisco and the Grand Canyon, had been down the Mississippi, then wandered on through Europe, through Spain, Italy, Sicily, France, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, and now divided his time between London and Paris.

The recital depressed Gombarov, because with the bitterness of unreasoning youth he realised his own disadvantages, the cramped narrowness of his life before coming to London, and his relative ignorance. He almost hated Christopher for the advantages he had had, and the knowledge he possessed. For he did not know the bitterness that was Christopher's, the bitterness that drove him from place to place, and gave him no rest, and with all his travelling made the world such a small place for him. Envy and dissatisfaction and bitterness gnawed at Gombarov, and in his feeling of impotence he could have wept.

"You seem to have travelled a great deal," said Gombarov, while Bagg was paying the bill.

"Yes. I suppose it's in the blood. My ancestors followed Daniel Boone across the American continent."

Once outside, Christopher excused himself for a few moments to buy cigarettes, and Gombarov observed:

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"I say, Bagg, that man knows too much!"

"He is a good poet, and we want him with us," said Bagg.

It was clear that Gombarov and Christopher had no use for one another. The time had not yet come for recognition. Two souls, blind to one another, walking in the darkness, they did not know that they sought one another. No oracle was there to tell them that in the chaos and turmoil of great events, five years hence, their eyes and hearts would suddenly leap to one another, and, their masking shells dropping away, would reveal one to the other, two lonely souls, lost dæmons, aspiring towards the islanded hill, where dwell the exiled gods.

THE INTUITIONISTS

In Soho Square the trio paused before a large Georgian house, with a broad arched doorway, single-pillared on either side. Mrs. Rodd admitted them and led them up a broad, curving stairway, harmoniously flowing banisters on the right, high white walls on the left.

The double doors on the second floor landing were open and they passed into the dining room. Here a large table, in the centre, was spread with sandwiches and cakes; on a small table at the side were bottles of wine, cherry brandy, whiskey and soda. Through the broad open door, a large company could be seen assembled in the next room, broken up in small groups, talking. They raised quite a clamor. The newcomers shook hands with the host, Mr. Rodd, who, sitting on a low stool, was holding forth to a little circle on Bergsonism. He was a big, brawny fellow, with broad features, and his voice was loud and aggressive. He was an art critic who expounded modern art, hence a Bergsonian. Gombarov noticed Strogovsky and Douglass among the listeners.

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He had not seen Douglass since their meeting in Paris, months ago. Rodd addressed himself chiefly to Strogovsky, who, as a neo-Kantian, was evidently disputing some of the new doctrines. When everyone was seated again, Rodd resumed where he had left off:

“ . . . All art is interpenetration. Men have always sought the absolute, the eternal in art. The old idea of static eternity is no longer tenable. Only life, ceaseless movement, continuous change, is absolute. Whatever is eternal lives and persists in this unceasing movement. We mourn the loss of Greek temples, whose beauty we call eternal, but if the earth were covered with Greek temples, you would destroy the implication of new creation. Something dies, something is born, every age, yes, every moment. There is a difference even between the early temple of Olympus and the Parthenon. But the memory of what has died persists, and joining with new perceptions and new experiences, gives rise to new structures created out of this interpenetration. A memory or a host of memories and perceptions from the past project themselves into a body subject to new perceptions in the present and continue their way into the future, never for an instant ceasing to undergo the processes of creation. It is the same in the life of a man. We say that a human body undergoes a periodical chemical transformation until not a single original cell remains; such is the transformation that goes on continuously in the whole creative world, which is an unceasing becoming through both inner action and new contacts, combined with the resistances of old but by no means dead bodies. Artists have always passed through such processes.

There is Whistler. Memories of Velazquez and Hokusai lurk in his art, but his new experiences and perceptions, his contacts with the French Impressionists and London have caused his art

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to evolve into what seems to be a new and original mould, which is really a creative projection of his personality: the sum total of all his hereditary and living memories and his perceptions and experiences. Nothing is lost here. The artist's personality, through infinite combinations and interpenetrations, has evolved into a will, and his art is an expression of this will, which discards what it cannot use and takes what it must . . . imagine to yourself a world in which things are made up of infinitesimal fragments that continuously fall apart and as continuously come together in a new form. . . .

"But if these processes are slow and continuous, there are intense moments and epochs—and epochs are but moments—in the life of humanity, of individuals as well as nations, which may be called moments of intuition, when great truths present themselves in culminating points, as in flashes of lightning, and great actions and renaissances—yes, even catastrophes—take place, and these bear witness to the Bergsonian truth. We have suddenly become conscious of the meaning of life, continuous becoming, which explains both life and death, really the same thing, and with this consciousness the creative process is accelerated, and we boldly project our impetuous forces against the resisting yet relatively dead bodies, such as Royal Academies of all sorts, and all deadish tendencies that bar the way to our upward, precipitate flight. . . ."

It was obvious that Rodd would have gone on, if it had not been that Bagg, who had heard it all before, unfolded a letter and thrust it under Rodd's very nose. Rodd, glancing at the letter, burst into a long, loud guffaw, and passed the letter to his neighbour.

It was Bagg's challenge to Winmill. The whole room was soon rocking with laughter. Gombarov's eyes suddenly fell upon a painting on the wall, showing a group of pregnant,



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laughing women dancing in one sweeping circle, painted by an English follower of Matisse, and it struck him that there was something in common between the expressions of the faces in the picture and the living laughing faces in the room. The room shook with fecund laughter. On its subsiding, there was a general movement towards the dining room, towards the sandwiches and the whiskey and soda. A few remained behind, chiefly the women. Gombarov took advantage of the relative emptiness of the room to examine the pictures.

The room, large and high, with three long windows leading to a balcony, combined harmony and comfort. It was a characteristic example of the best Georgian architecture. The furniture, too, was for the most part old and solid. Old miniatures and silhouette portraits hung over the mantel, but these modest specimens and gew-gaws were lost against the modern paintings hung round the walls, pictures full of strident movement and violent contrasts of colour. The room being but dimly lighted with candles, the flare from the fire on the broad hearth gave even a greater sense of animation to the pictures, especially to the picture in the centre of the left wall, showing a mechanical contrivance painted in a series of hard-edged strips of bright colour, which, as the active light jumped across them and pranced and wavered, gave the illusion of a kaleidoscopic dance of steel girders. The inscription underneath read: *War in the Air*. At one instant the old walls seemed themselves to totter and waver under the play of lights on the fantastic pictures.

Another picture that attracted Gombarov was called *Friedrichsbankof, Berlin*. It showed a perfectly intact engine, a monster in size, entering a station, and the houses on either side were tottering, and some were in a state of collapse, a mass

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of débris. There was English lettering on the side of the engine, and that was strange. Why should an English engine enter a Berlin station, why all this débris, why should the buildings totter? And if you but half closed your eye, you saw something else, the curiously phallic construction of the engine, and you gathered the impression that, consciously or unconsciously, the artist, doubtless, so intended it. Man was returning to primitive, to sexual symbols in art, and Nature the unconquerable was not above using for her own ends the mechanisms with which man has proudly presumed to have conquered her. All this flashed across Gombarov's brain in a single instant. A Bergsonian intuition, Rodd would have called it.

A little statuette, hewed out of granite, which stood on a writing desk, next attracted his attention. It was the figure of a pregnant negress, and she stood in an attitude of torment, curved almost into a question mark, her two hands on her stomach. It bore the inscription, *The Fecund Earth*. It was by the Jewish sculptor, Daniel Gordin. There was an extraordinary potency in it for so small a piece of stone. Hardly more than fifteen inches high, it yet gave an illusion of bigness; decorative, it was yet deliberately crude; a thing fraught with elemental forces, wrought by them from within and without; it was as a mountain in travail giving birth to new life. Gorbarov half closed his eyes and imagined it as a colossus in an African desert, the size of the Sphinx of Ghiza, a host of awed worshippers bowed down before the mystery of creation.

"Mr. Gombarov, will you have a whiskey and soda?" he heard Rodd's voice, and his host handed him a glass. "A fine thing, isn't it?"

"Do you work in this room, at this desk?" asked Gombarov.

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"Yes. Why?"

"Don't you find your works of art rather disturbing?"

"Of course!" said Rodd, laughing. "That's why I work here. I want to be disturbed. I am a critic of dynamic arts, and I must have dynamic works of art around me to stir me to dynamic thinking."

DEMIGODS IN EXILE

They were joined by a young couple, who also stood regarding the statue.

"Do you know each other?" asked Rodd. "No. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Hector Cowley, otherwise known as Heracles and Hylas, because of the Greekishness of their poetry—Mr. Gombarov!"

Mrs. Cowley—Hylas—gave him the deciduous hand of a Henry James heroine, and Heracles followed with a more hearty handshake.

"That is not to say," explained Rodd, "that there is anything pseudo-classic about their work, but they have Greek memories and quite up-to-date perceptions. In fact, Mrs. Cowley is a countrywoman of yours, a Yank like yourself." And laughing, Rodd left Gombarov to his new acquaintances.

"I've heard of you," said Hylas, "from Toby, that is, from Mr. Bagg. I believe we both come from the same city, the City of Brotherly Love!"

"Yes, it's a good city to *come from*," said Gombarov significantly.

Hylas burst into a nervous laugh. "That's delicious, Mr. Gombarov! 'A good city to come from!' Why, Hector won't believe half I tell him about our city. You are not exactly a native, are you? A Russian, I believe. But I had the great misfortune of being born there. . . ."

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"You Yanks amuse me," said Heracles. "I've yet to meet a writing chap or artist from the States who has anything good to say for Gawd's own country."

"Now, Hector," said Hylas, holding up a playful finger, "you know that you'd rather be a Frenchman! Yet Hector is an Englishman from way back. His family tree would make the best families in Philadelphia green with envy. I am urging Hector to take a journey to America. It would be an amusing experience, don't you think?"

"Decidedly," rejoined Gombarov. "I dare say, he'd get all sorts of invitations to read his poems before the women's clubs, the Browning Societies, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the anti-Saloon-Leaguers . . ."

"There, Hector!" said Hylas. "What did I tell you? You'd. . . ."

"I say, sure, I'd be the main cheese, the only smell going!" said Hector, breaking out into Americanisms and badly imitating the twang. "I'd be the only pebble on the beach. I'd have a real peach of a journey, and some peacherinos, sure, would come to listen to me. Brass bands and bouquets everywhere, eh, kiddo? And some real nice skirts would fall for me. . . ."

"Don't, Hector!" Hylas burst into her hysterical laugh.

"You must come and see us," said Hylas, as the company began to return after refreshment. She drew a card out of her bag. "Come next Thursday, if you like. Do come!"

Gombarov watched Hylas's tall, languid figure trail off on Heracles's arm. She was as tall as he, and his broad form accentuated her height and slenderness. Altogether a Botticellian figure. She had a small head, too small for so tall a body.

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Its smooth brown hair, terminating in a Grecian knot, fitted it closely and revealed its exquisite shape. Her face was like a Greek marble, except for one flaw, the nose, whose tip seemed slightly chipped off as if by accident, so that the effect was that of a museum marble. Her eyes were a sea-grey, as became a poetess, a devotee of Glaukopis Athene.

Heracles's face was that of a broad-faced, small-nosed satyr, "lacking just two budding horns and vine leaves in the hair," as Tobias had once put it in a bantering mood. As if he were actually supplied with these satyric appurtenances, he never wore a hat but allowed his longish, fair, straight hair to hang about his head in wisps. Tobias claimed him for his disciple, and Tobias was a man to learn something from his disciples. Heracles himself used to declare that his wife was the greatest poet of the age, Sappho herself come to life, and confessed that he owed his poetic stimulus wholly to her. She was some years older than he, and their apparent happiness was a thing Gombarov had dreamt of.

Gombarov saw Hylas and Heracles walk away, and sadness gnawing at his heart, he thought of Winifred. Of the pair Gombarov preferred Hylas. She was a woman and there was an intriguing air about her, and she was friendly, and he was famished for the mere presence of woman. As for Heracles, in spite of his joviality at the moment, there was a lurking moodiness about him and a sense of English reserve; one felt oneself before a closed gate flaunting a "no trespassing" sign. He had heard of both of them from Tobias and had read some of their poems, which appeared for the most part in the more precious American periodicals.

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

LEAGUE AGAINST AGE

Of the several Primitivists in the room there were as many Englishmen as Americans. The movement had its impetus in America, by way of France. The Americans gave *vers libre*, the French precision. Poetry was laid on the table, operated upon, and had its "cosmos" removed, like some useless appendix. Sentimentality, rhetoric, vagueness and *clichés* went along with it. Words were reshuffled, revalued; adjectives, except essentially descriptive ones, were discarded as so much dead matter; hardness, concreteness and precision were required. Rhythm and cadence were to displace rhyme, and integral patterns were placed above subject-matter. The new poetic efforts were received with abuse and ridicule in the press, which delighted the rebels.

Young, confident and militant were the rebels gathered at Rodd's, especially the Americans. "There is Tobias Bagg," reflected Gombarov, "a broncho-buster, if there ever was one, let loose in the culture pastures of Europe, lassoing every kind of Pegasus that happens to strike his fancy, and breaking it in to serve his uses. . . . There is Hylas, searching for live Greek fragments, just as another American, Isadora Duncan, has hunted among the Greek tombs and vases to rekindle in Europe and America the ancient flame of dancing. There is Roy Christopher, following the old culture trails of Europe to find new life, a quest as intrepid as the one in which his forefathers had followed Daniel Boone; but unlike theirs his has no end. For him no sea is a boundary, but only a starting point for a new journey. And here am I, not a native American, still an American, and here am I wandering, seeking, groping, as in some foggy hell, God knows where. How eager

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they all are, these Americans, myself, too, in this old country; but the natives seem by comparison tired, listless, quiet, perfect gentlemen. To them Europe seems to be a grave, to the young barbarians a cradle."

Or was it, he asked himself, that the young rocked a coffin, to wake the dead? "Heracles is alive enough under the influence of the Yankee Hylas. But there is Briggs, always writing of swans and peacocks and of girls he hasn't kissed and of his family troubles! A nice fellow, but how did he come among the thumpers?" Well, there was at least one thing that held them together: their common revolt against old age and all that goes with old age, the old age that would always betray youth.

While he was thus reflecting, the company were warmly discussing the new journal, Tobias leading the discussion. In moments of excitement he moved his arms and figure like a circus Indian performing a ritual dance.

There was much irrepressible life in the man. They were debating the title of the periodical, for which Tobias said "some half-witted sympathiser was willing to put up the funds." Some militant titles were suggested: "The Bayonet," "The Rapier," "The Attack," "The Thrust," and so on. Bagg's suggestion was then discussed, and a compromise was effected on "Self," with the sub-title: "An International Journal of the Arts. No compromise with public taste. No quarter to the Royal Academies. No encouragement to parochialism and local patriotism." The list of contributors was to include English, American, French, German and Russian names. Raymond Dinhard, leader and spokesman of English Cubists—he it was who painted the *War in the Air*—was present, and he promised to contribute some articles and manifestoes. Two or three of his disciples were also there,

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

who appeared to regard him with awe and roundly abused his critics and enemies. Conrad Barron, Bagg's admirer, also turned up. This youth, who had virgins on his brain, was a sallow-faced, grey-eyed Pole-Czech, and Gombarov did not take to him. After exchanging a few trivial remarks with him, he joined Douglass, who took him by the arm. They joined a little group, of which Rodd was again the centre, expounding Bergsonism:

" . . . we have at last invented a system that combines God and Devil in one, or, if you like, we have abolished both, and put in their stead the idea of creative evolution. What men call good and evil, creation and destruction, love and hate, are complementary to one another, are, in fact, one and the same thing. Destruction is creation. . . ."

"Don't you think sex is a good symbol for this?" interposed Barron. "There is no conception without destruction, as all good virgins learn, sooner or later."

Bagg winked an eye at Gombarov, who smiled.

"Yes, that is true," said Rodd. "In every sexual ecstasy a man momentarily destroys his woman, and he, the conqueror, destroys himself, too, in the process, is absorbed, as it were, by the vanquished. A young man of genius sits at his master's feet, yields to him, in order, like a woman, to absorb him. Who knows, Shakespeare might have thus sat at Marlowe's feet, and yielded to him as a disciple, in order to absorb him? Great weapons of destruction resembling phalli are being made by all nations, and it is conceivable that one day they will be used to destroy things that are to make way for the things that are to be. The artists also, in their new art, are forging weapons to batter down the doors of the Royal Academies to make room for the art that is to be."

"That is a terrible philosophy," observed Strogovsky, "for

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it does away with the absolute, the idea of things in themselves."

"It merely changes the conception of the eternal," replied Rodd. "Consider a formidable rock in the sea. Now men would call that rock eternal. But it is only a matter of time when that rock will be worn down by the sea, and only the movement of the sea is eternal. Living modern art is that gathering sea making onslaughts on the rock of the Royal Academy and all dead arts, and, conceivably, it will one day change the colours and contours of that rock. There is no dead matter, since anything can be changed or destroyed by impact or by inner chemical processes accelerated by this impact. There is only eternal energy, conflict, movement, and the indestructible human will, which, at moments of profound intuition, comes indeed like an irresistible tidal wave. . . . Never fear, all the walls humanity has built up will be battered down. It's all a matter of time. How many civilisations have fallen to make way for others, but none have fallen in a day, and none were built up in a day. And the new has always its beginnings before the old has fallen. It has always been interpenetration, the new ever impregnating what appears to be dead matter, and giving it new life in a new form. . . ."

"Hugh, the Cowleys are leaving," came up Mrs. Rodd, interrupting the conversation. "Heracles would like to have a word with you."

This was a signal for breaking up, and all the visitors were scrambling for their overcoats and hats.

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

KINGS WITHOUT KINGDOMS

Gombarov and Strogovsky walked home together, on that December night, in silence, each absorbed in his own oppressive thoughts. Latterly, Julius had been morose and uncommunicative. Each knew the other's troubles, these had been talked over again and again, there was nothing more to be said. And they were both ashamed before one another. What did all these things, such as love, matter? Beside the things that were going on in the world, beside the big thoughts being thought, the big things being done? And love was no more than hate, or the same thing, as Rodd had said. And here, along Bayswater Road, as always, sat old beggars, men and women, huddled together to keep warm; and there, across the way, as always, stood a row of big houses, with luxuriant bedrooms, man and woman, man and woman, man and woman, in large soft beds, and lovely soft things across a chair. Was it not so in Nineveh, in Babylon, in Carthage? What did it matter? Yet it did matter, if you were not a beggar in mind, but thought a king's thoughts, as you wandered on foot in a fog, without the tiniest kingdom, be that kingdom no more than your queen, a loved and loving woman, subject to your rule, a willing vessel for your loves and wraths.

"It's all nonsense for you and me to be going on like this," said Julius, breaking the silence. "And I can have no intellectual sympathy with either of us. Yet what's to be done? Rodd is quite right. We are vessels of energy, and what are we to do with this energy that pours over? The sea beats against the rock, the artist hammers against old doors, the soldier fires his guns on the enemy's defences; but what is left for us to do but to beat our heads against the wall, an unprofitable business!"

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They parted in the corridor on the top floor of their boarding house in Princes Square, and each went to his cold bed.

Gombarov turned from side to side, unable to sleep. His thought, a restless energy, squirmed within him, and he squirmed with it. The rain began to patter on the roof, and presently came down in a hard shower. The fog had apparently lifted. He felt himself alone and forsaken in this great London. He clutched at the pillow and groaned as in pain.

He had a dream. He dreamt he sat in a blue room, in the twilight and that he flew a kite out of the window. There was a single bright star in the sky, and towards it the kite aspired. He was letting out the string little by little and came to the end of it. The kite was tugging toward the star and could not reach it. He felt infinitely sad and thought, where could he get more string? And suddenly a woman's form appeared beside him. It was a Botticellian figure, with the face of a smiling Fra Angelican angel, and together they bent down to look in cupboards and under beds and in all sorts of corners and crevices for a bit of string, so that the kite might reach the lone star. He was filled with a great hope that together they would find that bit of string, and that his kite would at last reach the lone star. His companion was on her knees on the floor, and graceful was the line of her curve in voluminous, clinging draperies. "I have it!" she exclaimed, turning her face to him, while her hair brushed him. But a hard, frightening knock came on the door, and he shook all over. He opened his eyes on broad daylight. He lay still, uncertain whether he was still dreaming.

A hard knock came to the door. He shouted:

"Come in!"

Lily came in, smiling, a jug of steaming water in her hand:

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“Well, you are a sleepy-head!” she said. “That’s the third time I’ve knocked.

And, as had become her habit, she came over to him and kissed his lips, and sat down on the edge of his bed.



CHAPTER VII: WITCHES' CAULDRON

*"Weary se'nnights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine:
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost."*

—MACBETH.

IN QUEST OF KNOWLEDGE

"WELL, ducky-bird," said Lily, as she sat on the edge of his bed and shook a finger at him. "It's another late night you've been having! Doing good to the girls, eh? Well, b'hoys will be b'hoys, won't they, honey?"

He lay still, and made no answer. She waited a few moments, then bent over and kissed his lips again, and took hold of the cold hand lying outside the bed-cover. She took it in her two hands and rubbing it and fondling it, went on speaking:

"My poor ducky-bird is cold. My poor ducky-bird wants warming up. My poor ducky-bird wants making a fuss of. A nice girl to hold his hands. A nice girl to kiss him. . . ."

And she bent over him again and putting her lips to his kept them there.

He was beginning to be keenly aware of the proximity of the white buxom girl. He felt himself thawing out. She was infusing a warmth into him. It came gently at first, then poured through his body in a wave. His two arms, coming out of striped pyjama sleeves, slipped round her shoulders and held them, fingers spread out and feverishly clutching and digging, through the material, into the soft flesh. Coinci-

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dently, a thought stirred in his mind, a long conceived, a hesitating, an unacted thought, which first came to him in the days when, much to his astonishment, Lily began to show a fondness for him. It was an unaccountable fondness, as Lily already had a young man, whom she had promised to marry. It was an incomprehensible state of affairs that curiously intensified his misgivings about Winifred. The thought had been stirring in his mind for weeks, but he had lacked courage to put it to the test, for it takes courage for men of Gombarov's type to act unlike themselves, and he had waited until the thought should gather sufficient impetus to translate itself into action. His fingers still clutching at Lily's shoulders, he was thinking fast, precipitately, a wave of blood pressing on his brain.

"What are you thinking of, honey?" she asked, observing his preoccupation.

Her question seemed to snap the last thread of his indecision, and hurling himself out of bed and pressing her shoulders down he leaned over her and with strangely dilated eyes looked into hers, which showed fear.

"Don't! Please don't!" she cried, as if she had divined a sinister intention on his part. "You know, ducky-bird, I would give myself to you, body and soul. Indeed, I would, darling, for I like you heaps. But I'm afraid! Horribly afraid. You know I would if I weren't afraid! Don't you think I want you? But we mustn't!"

And they looked into one another's eyes, full of fear, his as well as hers.

"And yet, Lily, you have a young man," he said, slowly, and added: "Do you mean you'd do it, even though you have a young man, if you weren't afraid of a baby?"

"Yes," she replied, unhesitatingly. "He never need know

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it. You make me feel like that. But what chance has a girl the likes of me in this world, if anything happened? And you, being a gentleman, could never marry me. I'm just afraid, that's all!"

"That's all I wanted to know," said he, releasing her. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I wouldn't hurt you, poor child, for all the world. I just wanted to see if you would."

She stood up, shook herself, and looked puzzled.

"Forgive me," he said. "You know I didn't mean to hurt you!"

She laughed and walking up to him planted an impetuous kiss on his lips and ran out of the room.

He remained standing in his pyjamas for some time, thinking. But he was not thinking of Lily. He was thinking of Winifred. He would not have taken advantage of Lily even if she had not protested. He had merely used the energy of a passionate moment to try out his thought, conceived long since. As a result of his test, a new thought, a new misgiving, came to him. If Lily, despite her young man, was willing but for fear of consequences, what of Winifred in Paris, if some intrepid young man appeared with less conscience than himself—and Paris bred such young men in plenty!—yes, what of Winifred?—granted that she entertained no such fears? For she had forsaken him once and he was not sure of her.

His mind full of tumultuous misgivings, he vigorously proceeded with his shaving.

A WOMAN'S WAY

He found two letters waiting for him at the breakfast table, where Julius sat, morosely consuming his porridge. One letter was from his mother, the other from Winifred.

He opened his mother's letter first. It contained an account

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of family affairs, which was even more depressing than usual. Things were going from bad to worse. The little sum he had left with her from his many years' savings was nearly gone. Her husband, Semyon Gombarov, was still collecting material for his book on Comparative Cultures, Ancient and Modern, Occidental and Oriental, all of which was excellent for a bonfire, but hardly the sort of thing one could make a meal of. Besides, he was now a confirmed invalid, and the doctor said he ought to have his daily chicken broth. Raya, the truly golden heart, was still making artificial flowers. Absalom was working as a book-keeper, but was troubled with his eyes, which necessitated his taking a holiday, and Sonya, poor girl, was about to undergo another operation on her ear. Dunya, though the mother of two little ones, with difficulties of her own, did all she could for them. Misha, with his genius for mathematics, was about to try for a Government position. Of course, she knew that he, John, had been a very good son, had sacrificed his life to them and so ought to have his chance; still, wasn't it foolhardy of him to remain in Europe when good jobs were going in America? Wouldn't it be to his interest, for the good of his career, to come back and either resume his position on the *New World*, or with his increased experience find a better in New York? He had better think it over. Besides, she didn't like the idea of his being without a home, living among strangers and no one to look after him.

Gombarov translated the letter which was written in Russian, to Julius, who said without hesitation:

"My dear boy, I advise you to stay where you are. You have given your life to your family and though it's true they couldn't help it, yet they've drained every drop of your blood. You've got yourself to look after. As it is, you have such a handicap to overcome. I sometimes marvel at your courage,

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after the start you've had. But look at it practically. What will happen if you go back? You will be caught up in your old whirlpool, and you will end up by cutting your throat, which will be a kindness neither to your mother nor yourself. Besides, you've been only nine months in Europe, yet you've changed incredibly. You'll not be able to go back to the old grind. It's unthinkable, my boy!"

"You are quite right, Julius. I've been thinking that myself. Just what I would do, cut my throat! Mother is a brave, enduring soul, but what can I do? God knows, it hasn't been easy for me here, what with earning my living, thinking of art, and of other things I need not tell you of."

He opened the letter from Winifred, but as he read on his face slowly turned grey. Julius fixed his eyes on his friend and waited for him to speak. But Gombarov, thrusting the letter into his pocket, said nothing, and listlessly sipped his coffee.

"Look here, Jehn," said Julius. "I don't want to pry into your affairs, but I don't like to see you suffering. Chuck it, I say, once and for all. If you can't chuck it, be firm. The best of women want to be ruled with an iron hand. You don't want to deal with the woman who is at the back of your mind, but with the woman as she is. Don't be too soft with them. There is too much humanity, too much pity in you. Mind you, I like you for it. Still, women are not slow in taking advantage of it. You've got to be firm with them, though they be angels incarnate. They can't help themselves."

"You may be quite right," said Gombarov, after a silence. "Still, there's my own nature. Shall I compromise with myself? And an American woman has been trained to expect chivalry from a man."

"All women are at bottom alike," replied Julius. "And there

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are times when a man must overcome his own nature, be above himself. There is only one way to deal fairly with women, and that is to be a man to them, firm and unvacillating. You must follow the biological law."

They gave a spontaneous laugh. A good sign, to be still able to laugh.

"I know it's all very silly," said Gombarov. "I never go out of my way to seek a quarrel. Yet what is all this about? Simply this. Some days ago she sent me a novel and asked my opinion of it. In this novel a woman of spirit has the choice of marrying a man of genius, one of the vampire sort, who thrives by absorbing others, or a nice harmless, soft-hearted idiot named Reginald. She chooses the first and loses her personality in him. He has no use for her but as a housekeeper and bedfellow. The woman of spirit submits. Yet all the while she holds the other man as a friend and companion, and he submits to the humiliation. That rather riled me. Such things may be possible in our civilisation, but I hold that it is unnatural. A woman who marries the man of her choice, yet keeps her other lover tied to her apron-strings is detestable, while Reginald is a milksop and deserves his humiliation. I said so in my letter. Now it appears that Reginald is a particular pet of hers, I mean Winifred's."

"All this is very trivial," said Julius, with a shrug.

"Nothing is trivial, things only seem trivial," returned Gombarov. "Trivial things in matters of love are the straws showing the way the wind blows. Why did she send me that of all books, insisting, too, for an opinion of it? Why should she take a fancy to a milksop like Reginald—it's not like her at all!—and then pick a quarrel with me because I called him a milksop? She may not be doing it deliberately, or even

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consciously. Yet she may have an eye on one of those budding geniuses that Paris is full of, and she is fancying herself in the part of the wife and me playing the part of Reginald the milksop! Women's acts are usually trivial, but their motives are often of great inwardness. Besides, a woman seldom quarrels with her lover about books; she either shares his opinions or pretends to. The only time I've quarrelled with her about a book was when she chucked me the first time. It was the prelude to her chucking, and that's why I don't like it. That being so, you will say I ought to chuck the whole thing. Perhaps I should. Yet, though I see all this, how am I to control my feelings, all of which irresistibly draw me towards her, as if she were my very lost soul, without which I cannot live?"

"Whatever you do, my boy, be firm with her. Don't let her feel that you haven't got hold of the reins."

Gombarov lapsed into melancholy, and said after a silence:

"What do you think of moving to Bloomsbury? I examined my bank balance yesterday and calculated my income. I cannot afford to live here and pay for meals that I don't have. In Bloomsbury, too, I shall be saving on bus fares."

"Not a bad idea. I too must retrench. My lessons are not bringing in much. What do you say to looking for a place to-day?"

"Righto!"

FOG

Ten days later the two friends were installed in Bury Street, Bloomsbury, not many yards from one another, and within sight of the British Museum.

"Bury Street!" exclaimed Julius. "Just the street for two living corpses!"

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Theirs were typical Bloomsbury "digs," containing all the melancholy paraphernalia usual to bed-sitting rooms which fetched their owners ten-and-six a week, without breakfast. There was an appearance of dust on everything, and the windows looked out on grimy roofs and armies of chimney-pots and telegraph wires.

In looking through the chest of drawers Gombarov found a large quantity of luxuriant silken red hair fittingly shrouded in a black veil, doubtless a souvenir of a Bloomsbury romance and by no means an edifying omen to a disconsolate lover. The hair seemed alive, as if it were still on the head of its owner and the temptation he had to stroke it reminded him of a certain story by Maupassant, which told of a man's passion for just such a treasure, a passion that drove him to put it by him on his pillow every night. "Poor little woman!" thought Gombarov. "In leaving this behind, the man to whom you have entrusted these locks has betrayed you!" He wrapped them up and restored them to the place where he had found them. "Why should this make me sentimental?" he asked himself.

There was not much to choose between their landlords and landladies. Gombarov's landlady was a short fat cockney woman married to a German tailor, who, on seeing Gombarov's books and learning that he was a literary "gent," spouted to him, when the opportunity offered on "de pewtiful poezie" of Schiller and Heine. "There's no such poezie in England," he used to say. "We Germans make pest poezie and pest beer. . . . Ach, Gott, and die German moozic!" Julius's landlord was an Englishman, a silent man, while his wife, a thin-faced, shrewish hag, took the precaution of warning her lodger that her house was "strictly respectable. For gentlemen only. No lady visitors allowed!" Poor Julius, returning to his room

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late the first evening, while on the stairs heard voices coming from the bedroom occupied by the virtuous pair. One phrase caught his ear: "You —, you are worse than a prostitute!" uttered by his landlord.

At that time there descended upon the two friends a pall of fog, dense and impenetrable, internal and external, a fog of sadness, of inchoate despair. They were steeped in that fog, and there was no sign of its lifting, and they were doomed to walk in it as blurred, disturbed shadows, shrouded in a smoky mist only a degree less shadowy. Grey shadows, they walked in silence, in separate and distinct universes, and their unheard hearts were screaming eagles within making free with sharp, pitiless beaks and agitated broad-flapping wings; and they seemed to walk among other shadows, equally grey and indeterminate, among other separate and distinct universes, some silent, some talking or murmuring, some boisterously laughing, but all equally shadowy, equally unreal.

Gombarov got into the habit of getting up late. Why get up at all? To wake in the morning was to prepare for one's execution. Sleep itself was a passing into another kind of wakefulness, in which the nothingness and unreality of day assumed highly concentrated forms of dream and nightmare. What horrible beings lived in the chaos of unconsciousness, what shaggy sinister forms with jeering faces, prodding one at last into waking in cold sweat and terror, and arousing an impulse to stretch out a hand and grasp at a poison pill or a revolver, wherewith to put an end to an existence in which such things were possible.

There was a night when he thought he was awake, and he heard the door quietly open until it rested against the bed, where his head lay, and a woman, a hag-like creature, peered round the door at him. She was ugly and horrible, malice and

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lasciviousness and evil were on her face, and with it all she was smiling; only in hell could one conceive of such a smile. And, looking upon her with fascinated terror, he thought: "She is evil incarnate, all the ugliness of the world is concentrated in her face. If I do not stare her out, I am lost!" And, in sweat and terror, with all the will at his command, he raised his head from the pillow and stared at her with a painful intentness, until the face lost some of its features, turned amorphous, and slowly vanished. He dropped his head back on the pillow and, quite awake now, wondered whether he had been awake while the vision lasted. And, inevitably, he thought of Winifred, who had forsaken him.

There was another night, another dream. He was sitting in a barber's chair, and in the next chair sat a burly, bald-headed man with great folds of fat running over his collar at the back of his neck. He had a hard, aggressive face, the face of a ruthless business-man, who ground down widows and orphans and took the last bit of bread out of their mouths. Gombarov observed him with horror. The barber was playing a keen blade over Gombarov's face, and it suddenly occurred to him that the barber intended to cut off his head. "It's all right," the barber seemed to say, "don't be alarmed. It will be much easier to shave than on your shoulders." And helplessly he observed the barber cutting off his head, and doing the same to his horrible neighbour. Then he grew fiercely terrified, as he divined the barber's intention of putting Gombarov's head on the shoulders of the other customer, and the latter's horrible head on his own shoulders. He tried to protest, but found himself unable to utter a word. He just caught the barber's words: "You'll be much happier with this one!" and swooned away into wakefulness. And on awaking, in cold sweat and terror, he thought of Winifred, who had forsaken him.

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And, days and nights, thinking of her, he saw no future, only a wall of impenetrable fog. His mind, too, was in the nature of fog, motionless but for the scurrying of blurred shadows of thoughts, and neither ray nor shaft of light to give colour or semblance of conscious life. His heart alone lived and flamed, with terror and despair.

He revived on days when the outer fog, tinged a translucent yellow, the yellow of a canary and soft as its down, brooded over London like an immense yet gentle fowl, and he found it pleasant to lose himself in it as a young bird under the protecting soft wings of its mother. This yellow fog calmed him, soothed him; his whole being softened under it, borrowed from its mellowness; with fascination he watched the soft, two-dimensional purple shadows flit by. On such days his favourite spot was the Thames Embankment, where his eyes, resting on the river, found peace in contemplating the funereal barges, which either stood still or moved in stately procession toward London Bridge. A red sail nearby, its colour softened by the yellow air, was like an outspread wing of a huge bird resting on the water. Nothing could be lovelier than the Bridge, observed from the Embankment. It was a deep purple, two-dimensional, for all the world like a series of arches cut out of cardboard, or better, soft felt, and the 'buses and the drays and the little people which moved or glided across it also appeared to be cut out of the same flat felt and lost in the yellow as in the reflection of dim firelight. It was all as in a fairy tale, and had all the unreality of childish invention. He found a comfort in this beautiful unreality, and reflected with some pleasure upon the fact that he, too, must have seemed a two-dimensional toy cut out of soft felt and swathed in the yellow caressing light of another world. He immersed himself in contemplation of this unreal world, and his troubles

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vanished, or became transformed and transfigured, assumed this unreal, decorative, two-dimensional quality, put on the deep purple of a king's robes. What did anything matter? Princes and princesses glided by, or were they beggars? It did not matter. They were all alike, and they were all beautiful. A strange faith came to him out of this yellow fog, an incomprehensible belief in beauty consuming ugliness, reality and pain. What else mattered?

But there were times when things did matter, especially on waking in the morning. Waking to what? To thoughts of nothingness and death. . . . Still, there was plenty of time for that; in any case, one must die sooner or later.

He would set to work preparing his breakfast. Breakfast without hope was a wretched thing. It made a bad start for the day. The thought of Winifred interposed itself into the most trivial things. He had once liked to think of having his breakfasts with her, of seeing her things on the wall, of hearing her footsteps in the next room or coming up the stairs. . . . There were all the usual thoughts a man thinks. . . . When she was loving and kind to him, he had regarded her pityingly, as if she were a child, but when he saw her slipping from his grasp he could have treated her as ruthlessly as any soldier a virgin on entering a conquered city. He could see her side, too: life was flitting by, and what with his handicaps much time would pass before he could ask her to come to him. Why had he been given reason and pity on the one hand, this fierce masculinity on the other, to be torn between the two? He thought of that dream of his in the barber's chair. One must choose either, but he was both.

He wanted a love that would give itself unconditionally, flame eternally. It is said that every man desires a woman like his own mother, and his mother had loved her Semyon



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unconditionally, enduring everything for the sake of her love.

Breakfast over, he would sit down at the table, pen in hand, a pile of paper before him, and fixing his gaze out of the window on the chimney-pots, row upon row of them, one above the other, he would sense a hard Cubist impression of life, and only a rare small tear, blurring his vision, would dissolve the geometric perception, against the background of intersecting telegraph wires, into an illusion of running, even precipitate, musical notation, which, if it could be translated into sound, would doubtless be productive of a jangling, frenzied, iron music, interposing itself between him and the waning harmony of his lost world beyond.

Having achieved a comma, a phrase, or even a paragraph, he would rise, put his hat and coat on, and venture out. After some indecision he would run in to see Julius.

He would find Julius sitting in his dressing-gown, looking into the fire. One elbow on knee, chin on palm, his frame would be rigidly motionless, a thing hewn out of stone, a distinguished brooding emanating from every inch of it, for all the world Rodin's *Le Penseur*. This brooding swathed him like a perplexed aura, hovered round him in thick clouds; its infectious fumes caught poor Gombarov, who, after futile efforts at cheering up his friend, would succumb to the same brooding silence, until unable to bear its intensity any longer, he would depart, leaving his friend in the statuesque attitude in which he had found him. They were Job meeting Job, but Gombarov's pity for himself was lost in his pity for his friend, who, like himself, had cut the thin thread that held him to his cherished world, and he now glimpsed that world gliding in the distant ether, unreachable and irrevocable. And his frozen fury held him still and rigid in his chair.

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FLAMES

This is how things had come to such a pass for the two friends.

Coincidentally with Gombarov's receipt of his letter from Winifred, Julius having long contemplated the futility of his own affair had already come to a decision and despatched to his love an ultimatum of "All or Nothing!" One morning a voluminous letter arrived for him, and it was quite apparent from his face, as he silently read it, that the answer was, in fact, Nothing! Clearly, few women could write "Nothing" in a single word.

As for Gombarov, he had been conducting an acrimonious correspondence with Winifred for a full fortnight, and matters had approached a breaking-point. Julius, moved partly by sympathy for his friend's suffering, partly perhaps by his fury, unspent after his own precipitate action, passionately exclaimed:

"Your policy of reasonableness will never get you anywhere. There are no two ways out of this. What you want to know, once and for all, is whether she wants you or not. You must put it to her firmly and clearly. You are writing to her now, are you? Well, write her this." And Julius grasped his friend's hand, that held the pen, and furiously conducted it across the paper.

"This correspondence," declared the two-handed pen, "has gone on long enough. I must know, and have a right to know, what your intentions are. I demand all or nothing, and ask for a definite answer as to which it shall be. I need not dwell here on my own feelings towards you. These have been quite clear and unconditional, and I cannot do with less from you!"

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"You don't think it's too strong?" asked Gombarov.

"You can't make it too strong. If a woman loves you, she won't let you go just because of that. On the contrary, she'll have a new respect for you. If she doesn't love you, it doesn't matter!"

Gombarov had to confess this to be good reasoning.

"Now address the envelope, and let's go out to post it," added Julius, seeing his friend hesitate.

And it was done.

An answer came within three days: Nothing! Or words to that effect. She added that if he returned her letters, she would return his.

The last thread that held him to the eternal snapped. Love, that atoned for his past, gave reason to the present, and was to have been a projection into the future, had ceased to exist. The illusion of love, if illusion it was, had held him together, and now that it was gone he felt himself to be falling apart; and life appeared to be no more than a collection of inconsequent fragments, drifting hither and thither, with nothing to hold them together. Was it weakness to give love so high a place? Weakness or not, now that it was gone and left him empty, a whirlwind of rage swept through the devastated places of him, and for a full week a demoniac fury drove him through the London streets, until it spent itself and left him exhausted.

He did not reply to her letter. On the eighth day another letter came from her, imploring him to write to her. Was he still among the living, and well? She was frantic for news of him, she was horribly afraid of his doing harm to himself. God knew, though things could never be as he wanted them, yet she felt as sad as he. But if only he was still alive, she would feel comforted.

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"I am alive and quite well," he wrote, to relieve her anxiety, "and please do not trouble to write me again." He was sorry for her, but felt that he had to be hard, even on himself. His stubbornness aspired to become a will. He needed that to replace his lost illusion. He said to himself: "To lose in the estimation of others is a misfortune, to lose in one's own eyes is a calamity." He was fighting for life. His back against a wall, he straightened out. A wall was straight, it was a good place to straighten out against.

Then, three days later, came the final blow in a letter from her, hitting him in his most vulnerable spot. "The trouble with you is that you have no character." And again, she curtly reminded him of the unreturned letters. Strange, how a woman always picked one's most vulnerable spot. She took the very ground from under his feet. If he had not character, then he had nothing. All his conscious life he had been trying to decide this vexing problem, as to whether or not he had character. And now the answer came from one he had cherished as his own life. He collapsed under the blow, but his rage and stubbornness braced him, and he hit out half blindly, half deliberately in a letter, which he had much sinister pleasure in writing.

"I am sorry," he began, "that I cannot comply with your request for your letters. They are my own, all the more since I have paid for them with several years of unswerving devotion. Instead, I shall derive no little pleasure from 'consigning them to the flames' (that, I believe, is the thing heroes in novels always do). An excellent symbol, isn't it? Love going up in smoke! Love is so much smoke, isn't it? And all of life is so much smoke, too? There is a curious pleasure in watching poor living words, filled with one's heart's blood, wriggling and writhing in agony, as their flames ascend



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the chimney, and they become dust and ashes! It is a sentimental pleasure—I am aware how unfashionable such pleasure has become!—shall I be denied it? I choose these letters in chronological order. It is just as well to begin at the root, to watch how love grows and develops, 'like a mystery or a flower,' as the poets would say. And so the ceremony begins.

"There it goes—the first letter. . . . A charred remnant . . . what does it say? 'Your own, your very own Winifred.' The second . . . 'I want you, body and soul!' . . . That's all I could get of it before the flames sent the little wriggling words scurrying up the chimney. What will the third bring forth? 'Shall try to be so much to you some day. . . .' Gone. Up the chimney. Just so much smoke! Once more. ' . . . a hundred warm kisses. . . .' Up the chimney, my dear, the whole hundred of them! 'If I could see you for five little seconds. . . .' Up the chimney, in less time than that! Poor little writhing words. . . . 'It would be so nice to be in a little flat with you. . . . I will cook you two eggs every morning. . . . I will be your own little slave if you will let me. . . . I know you are doing everything you can for me. . . . I have implicit faith in you, always, and you must have in me. . . .' No more faith, no more eggs, eh? It does not matter. The flames will take all, including the little flat. 'No, I will not regret anything. . . . I am yours forever, forever, forever. . . .' Just three seconds for three forevers to go up the chimney. And two more forevers go the same way, with an 'Amen!' for good measure. . . ."

And more in the same vein. Let these words, he thought, look as eyes of reproach into her soul, and make her writhe even as the bits of crumpled paper writhed in the flames. Responsive flames swept through his body, and everything

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that went under the name of tender and noble withered. A smile played on his face, and suddenly catching sight of himself in the mirror, he did not recognise the smile as his own. He thought of Saville's masks, and said to himself:

"I must think out a mask for myself, or at least the idea of a mask, a vision of which I must keep ever before me. It must have a definite purpose and goal, and I must try to live up to it. Otherwise, I shall go to pieces."

A reply from Winifred came a week later. It was hardly likely to add to his peace. The gist of it was contained in the following sentences:

". . . I feel that nothing I can say will convince you that certain things are unjust both to you and me. Your letters have been painful to mother and myself, and apparently I am wholly to blame. Do you realise the enormity of what you have done? It is down in black and white. . . . You have cleared yourself, I stand convicted. . . . I can only protest sincerely, again and again, that I am not to blame for my change of feeling. I *did* change my mind every two or three months. I have written whatever letters you remember in complete honesty. . . . And it is simply this—I have changed my mind. You are not responsible in any way. You are the same Gombarov whom I shall always like and want to know all my life. But you must understand that women cannot help their poor, foolish minds. You must remember, too, that when I was struggling with my agonizing doubts of myself (not of you), your letter came and ended everything. . . . Perhaps you will think this a weak conclusion, but can't we always know each other? That should mean something, if little, to you. It would mean a great, great deal to me. . . . Please write to me. . . ."

"In other words," reflected Gombarov, "she wants me to

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stick to her like that milksop Reginald, as a 'friend.' I was right after all in my original diagnosis. But this can never be. . . ."

Without replying to her letter, he took up the burden of his lost world in addition to his other burdens. His money was dwindling, he was writing little and earning little, his mother went on sending depressing letters, his dreams of art had so far come to nothing, his health was affected, he had no friends in London who could help him, he lost all confidence, everything seemed to hit him at the same time, and he did not know what to do. The three witches at the cauldron had surely cooked a nice stew for him.

Every day the temptation came to him to return to America and to take up his job again on the *New World*. Why didn't he? A little pride, a little stubbornness, a little hope—God alone knew where it came from—together contrived to keep him there, and sometimes a word from a mere stranger. At this time a young Irish acquaintance from Philadelphia—a lawyer at that!—wrote him:

"I could hug you for having written, for, believe me, or not, I was seriously athirst for news of you—you and your GREAT IDEA. My dear Galahad, don't you know the Irish love a bold man? . . . Pardon me, but you have done something startling! Your leaving a good job, packing up your bag and taking a room in London possesses a truly Disraeliesque startlingness. . . . It is characteristic of a man of talent to hesitate about attempting big things of which he is capable; his discerning intellect clearly perceives his difficulties. Milton wasted (?) a youth-time; we remember how Stevenson backed and filled, and succeeded in finally and forever dodging the *great work*. I feel, however, in my bones that you are going to work out your literary (I hate the blooming word, but

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must use it, I suppose) salvation in your own way, in your own time. . . . Now, my dear fellow, bless you, hang on by your teeth . . . and look confidently forward to the inevitable dawning of your era . . . remembering that the night passeth and strength and peace come with the new day and a great light, AND remember me as ever, Your friend, Michael O'Connor."

How could he go back in the face of that? In the face of the faith of others? A letter like that from a practical stranger acted on him with the strength of an omen. Why should it come at precisely that moment, the moment of his great need? And he unaccountably drew from the words a faith, mystic in intensity.

His dreams, too, had sometimes the same quality. There was the dream he had about a fortnight after receiving Winifred's last letter. He dreamt he was in his room with one or two friends, whose identity he could not establish. Suddenly one of them exclaimed: "Look at that!" He looked up and saw a dagger over his door, point downwards. Moved by a strange will, without the slightest hesitation he seized hold of the sharp blade with a bare hand, and with a super-human effort bent it until it assumed the shape of a sickle. On waking, he somehow felt that the final betrayal was coming and that he would conquer it.

That very afternoon a parcel arrived. It contained all the things he had given Winifred, including a bracelet, a Venetian shawl and his letters. The sight of these objects was painful. Inanimate objects had a life of their own, and these particular objects, emanated in great waves, an aroma of tender associations. He did not want these things back. What was he to do with them? He could not give them away, nor sell them. And, surely, he could not keep them in his room. There

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was a power of disruption in them, and in their presence he felt himself to be just such a parcel of fragments, just such a collection of memories and associations. He must return them. He must beg her to do just this one thing: accept them and keep them as souvenirs of their former tenderness. He really wanted her to have them. They could not possibly belong to anyone else. There was no ulterior motive in this. Involuntarily, on top of this, came another thought, which, not to be repressed, brought a gloating smile to his face, the same smile he had caught in the mirror while burning the letters. This thought ran: "You know well enough why you want her to have these things. You know their painful effect on you. And you'd rather she suffered this instead of yourself. You may say, she does not care for you, therefore she will not suffer at the sight of these things. But you know well enough that she does love you, only she had not the strength to face circumstances. . . . Never mind, the presence of these things is sure to cause her pain in their constant reminder of you. Walking with another lover in the cool of an evening, with that shawl round her shoulders, a moment is sure to come in the midst of her happiness, when she will say to herself: 'I have betrayed someone who has loved me so!'" In moments of detachment he analyzed this contradiction in himself, and understood how thwarted nobility becomes malice, creative fires destructive, and beauty a gargoyle.

Three days later a letter arrived, which put an end to his fluctuations. Addressed in Mrs. Gwynne's hand, it was post-marked Venice. The letter began by expressing the hope that the parcel despatched from Paris had reached him, and went on:

"I have been offered a good position in New York, and we are now on our way there, via Naples. We shall be in Naples

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in a month, and we can be reached care of the American Express Company. If there is ever anything I can do for you, let me hear from you. I am still, Your friend, Priscilla Gwynne."

This news, if it stunned him, gave him also a new will, fired him with new desire. And he sat down to commit a superb folly, folly of follies. The fact that an address was deliberately given did not escape him. He sat before his paper and wrote and wrote, passionately and eloquently, firmly yet tenderly, logically yet lyrically. He was inspired with desperation. It would be his final appeal. And with true diplomacy he wrote to her mother, too. They were both long letters. He also packed the bracelet carefully and sent it to Naples, by registered post. Next day he sent two more letters, one to each of them. He begged Winifred not to make her decision precipitately, but to think it over carefully and weigh all the considerations, pro and con, which he had placed before her.

Then he waited for the weeks to pass, and, while waiting, he neither hoped any longer nor despaired. At all events, he had done all he could, and now he was prepared for anything and everything. And he just waited, waited. . . .

Life is full of taunts. About this time he received a letter from a former colleague on the *New World*, who wrote him congratulating him on his rumoured marriage. "If it is true that I am married," he wrote back, "then it is also true that I am a bigamist. When the Turkish-Bulgarian war is over, I intend going to Turkey, where a man may marry as many wives as he pleases, without anyone losing sleep over it but the husband." Thus he wrote in his malice and bitterness, and sat down to his work, which he had latterly neglected. And he waited for the weeks to pass, for the witches' stew to be unstewed. . . .

CHAPTER VIII: ACCEPTED BY THE REJECTED

"Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."

—ST. MATTHEW, XXI: 31.

"The stone which the builders rejected, the same is to become the head of the corner." IBID. 42.

REFLECTIONS IN PICCADILLY

MAN must have company, though he ever remain a solitary in its midst. Gombarov had, by now, acquired many acquaintances among painters and writers. He saw, at intervals, Bagg and Rodd, Hylas and Heracles, and made friends with Douglass, whom he liked for his blunt, simple ways. He sometimes went to the Tuesday evenings of the Irish poet, Patrick Raftery, who, boyish-looking in spite of his forty-five years, held forth rhythmically and decoratively before his visitors, chiefly young aspirants, in his small Bloomsbury apartments, amid books, pictures, hanging draperies and tall ceremonial candles, whose serene light, mingling with cigarette smoke, gave picturesque if subdued effects to the semi-circle of reclining figures facing the poet, endowed the still-lives with a rich soft glow and sent perpendicular glints down the bottles of red and white wine, cherry brandy and benedictine standing on a small table in one corner of the room. All this was successfully designed to create an artistic island haven amid the immense turbulences of murky London life. No potential artist was refused entrance here, no undesirable

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admitted twice. Gombarov could for once in his life crow over the multi-millionaire, who, unless he was a discriminating art patron, could no more effect an entrance here than the rich man get past the toll-stile of St. Peter.

Though, thank God, they eschewed politics and economics, the company of artists did not always content him. Art talk of the coteries, which were beginning to mark London like some spotted beast, was apt to weary one. It was not enough to eat eternally of one dish, however fastidious, and he hungered for life, the many-faceted adventure of larger humanities. During those many weeks of waiting for a reply from Winifred this craving became a sharp blade, aimlessly swinging to get within the reach of the spiritual bread and meat of life.

How was a stranger in London to find life? Life, if sought and snatched at, was a harlot, at the beck and call of a stout purse. Still, a hungry man is fascinated by food in shop-windows, and a man hungering for life must often be content with the mere observation of potential feasts in Life's shop-windows. He usually found himself wandering in Piccadilly Circus. In this triangle, shaped like a familiar symbol in Egyptian cuneiforms, was the sterile harlot womb of London. Where, then, was London's heart? Wiseacres would tell you that it beat with a steady tremulousness within the inaccessible walls of the Bank of England and in the surrounding regions of the city, abundant with huge coiling arteries.

Round and round he walked, from Leicester Square, turning the sharp angle at the Pavilion, up Shaftesbury Avenue and down Wardour Street, back to Leicester Square; then the same round again, meeting the same faces of women and girls with eyes which silently beckoned him. He observed the more wistful of them, dressed unobtrusively, unrecognisable for what they were but for their slow, erect walk and those

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beckoning eyes. They were different from the flaunting types he had seen in the streets of New York, Rome and Naples, and not so far different from the respectable women with whom they mingled on the pavements.

"Here am I," he grimly reflected, "walking round and round, just like one of them. In what way am I really different from them? They sell their bodies, I sell my brain, and for the same reason. We must live. I am, perhaps, the worse offender. And I am sure, they are better paid. . . ."

Some of them, tall, shapely and handsome, looked as if they would have made splendid wives and mothers. What drove them to it? Well, what drove him to do hack work? Was he making a farfetched analogy between venal newspaper work, as he remembered it on the *New World* and the vocation of these poor girls? He recalled those days, and the demands his work had made on his mind and soul, even though, as in prostitution, it gave a certain amount of personal freedom. You gave the best of your brain for a consideration, and your brain, such as it was, was at the service of the proprietor and the public. You had to follow the policy of the house, and if you had any thoughts of your own it was for you to keep them to yourself. It was not uncommon for an editorial writer to abandon a newspaper having a certain political policy and to transfer his employment for a better salary, to a newspaper having a diametrically opposite policy and to write convincingly and approvingly of what he had formerly written equally convincingly and disapprovingly. And always, in the end, youth displaced the superannuated. No profession, barring prostitution, contained so many cynics as journalism. This is not to speak against cynicism, which is profoundly misunderstood by the pseudo-optimistic who, with Pangloss, insist on regarding this as the best possible of all worlds. For cynicism,

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at its best, is in its way a philosophy, a stoical hardening of oneself to an acceptance of things as they are. It is a protective colouring, a preparation to meet what blows may come and thus soften them. If, after a day's work, you have but a grain of idealism left in you, you can indulge in it, as Gombarov had done, by sitting down in your own little room and writing a story or poem, or what you will, after your own heart. Thus, he reflected, a prostitute, after her day's work, may indulge in a lover, reserving for him what sweetness is left in her.

As he thought these thoughts, he was reminded that he had not yet learnt to accept life as it was, and it occurred to him that he would like to know these women and talk to them, and learn their secret, which might help him to face life with the same composure and nonchalance.

MOLLY

No sooner had this thought become a full-grown, fixed resolution, than he set out to put it into practice. One evening, as he went his usual rounds, he was attracted by a fair, slender, neat-ankled girl. She had a winsome if not exactly pretty face, broad across the eyes, and a large, if unobtrusive mouth, the whole face a mask of good nature. She was standing under the awning of the Pavilion, and her face was in the shadow of the broad brim of her hat, so that an observer caught a sense of these features, veiled by a smile, rather than the features themselves, and this intensified the impression of her attraction. He walked past her several times, and finally tipped his hat.

"Good evening!" she returned his greeting.

Shyly facing her, he was at a loss for words, and as she waited for him to speak, he finally blurted out:

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"Look here, I don't want to go home with you. But will you come and have dinner with me? I'd like someone to talk to."

"I don't mind, honey!" she replied, and took his arm.

"Where shall we go?" he asked.

"Well, you don't look like a multi-millionaire. You had better come along with me to the place I usually go to. The waitress is my friend, and she'll treat us properly."

"That will suit me fine!"

"You are an artist, aren't you?" she asked, as they walked on, arm in arm.

"A sort of one. I'm a scribbler, which is hardly better than a beggar."

"Never mind, boy, you'll get along. I'm sure you're clever, and have a lot of will. You're a Jew boy?"

"Yes," he said, astonished.

"Oh, you'll get on!" she repeated confidently, giving his arm a squeeze. "Here we are!"—and they paused before a little restaurant in the proximity of Leicester Square. "Let's go upstairs, boy!" she said, releasing his arm, and leading the way in.

They ran the gauntlet of tables, all apparently occupied by girls of Molly's vocation, who eyed the newcomers with professional interest. Molly was well-known there, judging by the nods she received. They ascended the stairs and found themselves in a long narrow room, less crowded than below.

As they faced one another across a corner table by the window, what astonished him was the child-like expression of his companion's face, intensified by a pouting smile, as she asked, pleadingly:

"May I have a Guinness, boy?"

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She looked like a child pleading for a bar of chocolate.

"Of course!" he laughed. "Here, waitress, two Guinness, please! What will you have to eat?"

"It will be good to have something hot!" and she ordered soup and chops. "My hands are quite cold!" She extended her hands to him.

"You have nice hands, child," he said, rubbing and stroking them. "But I don't know your name yet!"

"Molly," she replied. "Your hands are nice, too!"

"How old are you, Molly?"

"Twenty-five, boy."

"One wouldn't think it, to look at you."

"No, boy, but I've had a heap of trouble. Have a baby girl to take care of, too. About eighteen months old. Of course, I can't think of keeping it with me!"

"Then you are married?"

"No, boy. Got let down. Married some one else. Nine girls out of ten in this place will tell you the same story. It's a way men have with a girl. They are all alike!"

"Sometimes it happens the other way about," observed Gombarov. "But I don't understand anybody wanting to chuck you. You'd make a nice little wife to anybody. In different circumstances, I might kidnap you myself!"

"That's what they all say, boy. But there it is, myself and a kiddie to look after. There's the landlady, too, who takes the very skin of girls the likes of us. Oh, yes," she added between gulps of Guinness, "we might go into a workshop or the service, if they'll have us, and work off our hands and walk off our feet, without getting so much as a thank you! Or we might marry some bloke, and live in a suburban little home and spend our time looking out of the window, waiting for something to turn up. No, boy, not for me, thank

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you. Besides"—she laughed softly—"maybe, it was all pre-ordained, and I am paying out my Karma. . . ."

"Paying out your what?"

"My Karma. I once met a chap like yourself, who just wanted to stand me dinner and have a chat. He put the notion in my head. He was a Theosophist, and it was his notion that in my previous existence I must have been a man and done the dirty on a girl, promised to marry her, then let her down—with a kiddie, too!—and now I've been turned into a girl so I might be paid out in the same coin—just to taste what it was like!"

"If that's true," said Gombarov, "then I must have led the very devil of a life in my previous existence, judging by the way I am paying for it. I must have been a multi-millionaire who took the bread out of the mouths of the poor, and at the same time I must have been a fascinating female who led a young man a fearful song and dance."

"So that's your trouble, boy? Let me tell you no girl is worth it. If she does that, she don't love you! Well, maybe, the Theosophist chap was right. He was in dead earnest and told me heaps of facts, which he said was all in books and true. To tell you the honest truth, I often feel that if I were a young man, I'd do just that sort of thing, that's been done to me, even now—yes, boy, life is sure enough a funny mess! . . . What's your name?"

"Call me John, if you like!"

"Funny, that's my boy's name!"

"So you have a boy?"

"Yes. Even in my business, nearly every girl has her own boy. You've got to love someone, haven't you? Can't be pretending all the time, can you?"

"But there's your John! He isn't satisfied, is he?"

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"He wants me to quit it, but he can't support both kiddie and me, so we must wait. He knows I love him, and there's one little part of me that's all his own"—and she pointed to her left breast—"there's my heart, and I let no man ever touch it but John."

"That about describes my own case," reflected Gombarov to himself. "When my hack work is done, I sit down and try to do something that is all my own, for art's sake alone, something that has nothing to do with commerce. And that amounts to the same thing. I am acting just as this girl does." A peculiar calm, even contentment, descended on him from being with this girl.

"Go on, Molly, tell me more about yourself," he said.

"I don't know why I am telling you all this, except that you are one of those people one tells things to naturally."

"Yes, Molly, I sometimes think I have the nature of a father confessor. But tell me: you can't always go on like this! Don't you ever think of the future?"

"Don't! Don't!" She shut her eyes with her hands. "Don't talk to me about that! We daren't think of the future. . . ." She took her hands from her eyes. "Look outside. It is raining and sleeting. It is cold. Our stockings are thin. Our necks are bare. We walk for hours through sleet, rain and fog. Waiting for someone to pick us up. Sometimes we are lucky to get a gentleman. Sometimes the pig thinks he's bought us for a miserable sovereign. Sometimes it's nobody! And there's kiddie always to think of. And fine clothes cost money! A dowdy girl has no chance at all. A man won't look at a girl unless she has silk stockings. . . . We can only think of the present. To-morrow has to take care of itself."



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ANITA

There was a commotion at the next table. A girl who had just come in sat down at the table with four others, and was crying. Her pals were trying to cheer her up.

"Buck up, Nitty!"

"Don't cry, honey!"

"Here's a cup of chocolate for you, pet!"

"There's a dear," said the fourth, taking up the girl's handkerchief and wiping her tears.

She now sat up and tried to smile. Gombarov noted her jet black hair and dark eyes, which, deep and lustrous, glowed like liquid fire within their sockets. She had the strangeness and expressiveness of one who had suffered much, and had lost something of her beauty through suffering. Touched by the solicitude the others showed for her, Gombarov remarked upon this to his companion.

"We hate to see a girl in trouble," said Molly. "And trouble may strike any of us at any time. Anita—that's her name—was a very pretty girl once. . . ." And Molly lapsed into a sullen silence.

"Would it be too much to ask you what her trouble is?"

Molly did not answer at once.

"I don't know whether it would be right to tell," she said at last. "She is being sorry now." Molly looked at Gombarov, long and searchingly. "I think I can trust you," she went on. "But heaven help you, if you tell. I wouldn't tell you, if you weren't a Jew boy, and I didn't like you."

The reasons for her statement soon became clear. She drew herself across the table, and spoke in whispers:

"She was such a pretty girl once, the oldest of her family,

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with a widowed mother and some kiddies to look after. About three years ago she went out looking for a job, in the reviews and the halls. She had a good voice then—and there were her good looks. When the managers saw her, they jumped at her, you bet, and smacked their lips, you may be sure. Of course, they'd engage her, give her a good job too, if she would—well, you know! That's how some girls get on the stage. Not that she hadn't talent, but it wasn't that that counted with those goats. It's the old story, boy. Nitty wouldn't—not at first! Besides, she had a young man of her own, and he getting only two pound ten a week. But there was the large family, mostly kiddies. Wish people wouldn't breed so! What could Nitty do but give in at last? The first goat gave her a job starting at five per. After a bit another pretty girl showed up on the scene, and by then he had had his fill of Nitty, and Nitty passed into the hands of Goat Number Two. She passed like that through several pairs of hands, and the last one gave her something worse than a baby. He happened to be a Jew, and now that Nitty is on the street, she has vowed that she'd pass it on to every Jew she comes across—there, now you know why I've told you!”

“The brutes!” exclaimed Gombarov. “A horrible tale! And we call ourselves civilised. Poor little thing! Savages would have been kinder.”

“You may well say that. . . . She is being sorry now. But it won't last. One time she would come up to me and say: ‘You think me a beast, don't you? Well, perhaps I am! I do feel sorry for them afterwards, but at the time I simply can't help myself, and I have a great joy, my only joy. Yes, Molly, I know I'm going to hell!’ Another time, she'd get into a fit, and just yell: ‘I don't care! I don't care! I shall

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send the whole lot of them to hell, before I go there myself!'"

Gombarov looked at Anita with a new interest, not without a shudder. Her face was pale, and an intense flame showing in her eyes appeared to be consuming her. "Poor little Anita!" he thought. "Life has not treated you too well, and you look but a child, a poor, hurt child!" Who was to blame? Oh, the unfathomable cruelty of a pitiless world, and oh, the infinite malice of injured and humiliated humanity! Here, in Anita, once love had dwelt. Had she not sacrificed herself and her own dear one for the poor children of her hapless family? What was his own sacrifice compared with hers? And now, in her last gasp, she was turning on a vulture world, and even while she offered her rotting carcass to pitiless beaks, she was yet sufficiently aware that she was carrying retribution to a world that knew no pity. Who was to blame?

"Molly," said Gombarov, with a sudden impulse, "will you promise to do me a favor?"

"What is it, John?"

"I am not very well off. But I happen to have a sovereign in my pocket. Will you give it to Anita when I'm not here, and tell her that it came from a Jew, who saw her and took a fancy to her? Give her any explanation you like, so she needn't know that you told me anything. Will you do that for me?"

"Look here, boy, don't be foolish, if you can't afford it. . . . Still, I'll do it, if you like. You're a queer one!"

"That's a dear, Molly!" and he gave her the sovereign.

"Never fear," she said, to allay any suspicions he might have of Anita not getting the money. "Goodness knows, we are heartless enough, but we are not selfish!"

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KATHLEEN

The waitress had gone out to the nearest public house to fetch two more bottles of Guinness, when in came dancing a hilarious girl, holding her skirts up at her sides and displaying the tempestuous whiteness of her laced and frilled underthings. She seemed wholly oblivious to the scrutiny of amused eyes, and laughing, as if she would never stop, danced straight upon Molly. Her slender, black-stockinged legs, showing above her small, well-rounded knees, gave her the appearance of a young girl. Rebellious wisps of fair hair stuck out from under a green tam-o'-shanter, and her grey-blue eyes danced as nimbly as her girlish legs. She controlled herself sufficiently to exclaim:

"Oh, Moll!"

"Hello, Kath! What's up?"

Once more she burst out laughing, and again repeated:

"Oh, Moll!"

"You've been up to pranks again, I see," laughed Molly, infected by her friend's mood.

"It's the funniest yet," said Kathleen, planting herself in a chair, and suddenly restraining herself as she looked at Gombarov.

"Go on, out with it!" said Molly. "He's all right! Kathleen—a friend!" she introduced them.

"Yes, do go on!" urged Gombarov, amused by the alluring little figure.

But Kathleen gave way to another fit of laughter.

"What's one to do with her? She's always like that! Just a kid!" said Molly.

"Bless you, and it's forgiving you must be to me," said Kathleen, at last, with a delicious touch of Irish. "But it's



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too funny for words. Do you remember the young blood, that was all sweetness and honey on me and for getting off with me last night?"

"You mean the pale duffer with the shining topper and white shirt-front and a bit of hedge on his upper lip?"

"The very same. Well, there was he getting properly drunk, and there was I jumping into a taxi with him and taking him to Mrs. Ripp's. He was as droll as droll, taking off his trimmings in a strange fashion, like an undertaker would be preparing himself for his own funeral, and dropping off into a deep sleep with nothing but a vest itself and a topper on the head of him. Blowing his nose trumpet, too, he was like fury. You'd think he was the big elephant at the Zoo. There was Reggie boy expecting me, you'd suppose, to be sitting up for him till morning, until his own royal highness should wake, and to find his own little humble slave there by his side, with his bacon and eggs. There was I lying and thinking and worrying as to what to do, until a brilliant idea was born in me foolish little brain."

"You with your brilliant ideas!" interrupted Molly.

"Darling, wait till you hear. So up I jumps out of bed, and puts on me things. And up I go, gathering all of Reggie's things after, and doing them up in a neat little parcel, all but the topper and the undervest he had on, and his socks and his shoes. Then it's down stairs with them, and into a taxi, hugging his own royal highness's uniform. But I'm all for the proprieties and for being kind to a man, so I pinned a little *billet-doux* on his pillow, that said: 'I'm the one, your own darling, would like to be seeing you in the morning, with your shining crown and silken vest and dear little socks on, holding a kingly scepter in your noble hand.'"

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"What will Mrs. Ripp say?" asked Molly, when the laughter had subsided.

"Oh, Mrs. Ripp! First thing in the morning there does be a knocking on me door, and me sleeping peacefully in me own little flat, and waking from me beauty sleep, and there, as large as life, is the parcel on the chair, looking at me, and I laughing till me sides would burst. Up I jumps out of bed, and just as I am, in me linen and lace, grabs up the parcel and opens the door to a cherub of a boy. Says I to him: 'And it's you that's come from Mrs. Ripp for to be taking a parcel back to her?' And he hands me a note from herself, to say she had seventy fits to see Reggie come down at seven in the morning in his high hat and blanket, like a poor shipwrecked man, all excited-like, waving me *billet-doux* in one hand, his ebony stick in the other, the very Archangel Gabriel himself in person, and poor Mrs. Ripp never setting her darling eyes on him before! And it's after me reading the note and laughing and dancing before the wondering lad, in me linen and lace, that I handed him the parcel and a bob for his trouble and told him to hustle as quick as he ever could back to Mrs. Ripp. . . . But sure, I would be giving the sight of me two eyes to see Reggie through the keyhole in the morning, and him with his shining crown, his under-vest and socks, and holding a kingly scepter in his noble hand. . . ."

While Kathleen was recounting her adventure, in her best Abbey Theatre manner, her listeners frequently interrupted her with tearful laughter.

"Have a Guinness, Kathleen?" asked Gombarov.

"I don't mind if I do, and it's right kind of you!"

"I must be going," said Molly, and seeing a question on

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her host's face, she said: "I'm here almost every day about four, if you care to look in. Good-bye, boy!" She rose and shook his hand. "So long, Kath! May see you later."

"You are a cheerful little person, Kathleen!" he began.

"What's the use of a moaning and a groaning, and a worrying and a bothering?"

He manoeuvred her round to a serious mood and succeeded in getting her to tell about herself. He was astonished to find her dropping her quaint manner of speaking, except when she burst into her fits of humour. This was explained by the fact that she was born in the West of Ireland, but was educated in a convent school near Dublin. It was a kind of reversion to her early environment. She knew something about Irish literature and had seen Synge's plays acted. When she was nineteen—she was but twenty-four now—she married an Anglo-Indian officer and went out to India with him, spending much of her time between Burma and Ceylon. He turned out a brute, and after three years of married life, during which, for a mere trifle, he once beat her while in pregnancy, causing a miscarriage, she took advantage of a holiday in England to escape from bondage.

She, a gay, wild thing, humorously recollected the social functions held by officers' wives, and how she scandalised them by her unconventional behaviour and piquant tales:

"As I saw them there with their armoured corsets and stays and stiff manners, I used to delight in telling them of how I once went riding with my husband in the jungle, and how it used to get so hot that I would remove my frock and go on riding my horse just in my undies, and how the monkeys and the wild birds and the serpents would stare at me just as men might in Piccadilly!"

In London, at last, while her husband was away, she took

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some of her personal belongings and a few odds and ends of jewelry, crossed Westminster Bridge one night to "digs" in Lambeth Road, getting the cabby to stop long enough for her to fling the key of her husband's apartments into the Thames, which was her way of burning her bridges behind her. She sought work in the halls and on the kinema stage; her personality stood her in good stead for odd jobs, and she had come to straits, where, in the jobless intervals, she was forced to eke out a livelihood in Molly's way. What was one to do? One had to live.

"Why didn't you go to your mother? Didn't you say you had a well-to-do mother in Ireland?" asked Gombarov.

"Last person I'd go to! You don't know mother. She swore and cursed at me when I married an English officer, and when she heard that I went on the stage she swore and cursed at me some more, and vowed that I'd never cross her threshold. And I don't know that I can go back to that quiet life. Anyhow, I'm anathema to her. Do you know, she still swears and curses at me! Why, every Sunday afternoon, regularly, just as I'm having tea in my room, I feel a sudden shudder, and I know it's my mother's swearings and cursings coming at me all the way from the West of Ireland. It's just like a wind suddenly coming into the room, even on a quiet day and the window closed. . . ."

As Gombarov listened to Kathleen, not only was he fascinated by her lively personality, but he also marvelled at the whiteness and smoothness of her skin. And she was child-like in her gaiety and playfulness, and surely there was less real wickedness in her than in many virtuous, respectable persons he had known. And her presence comforted him.

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JUDITH

During those weeks of waiting, broken only by a simple acknowledgment from Naples of the receipt of his letters and bracelet,—for Winifred fell in with his suggestion to write only after careful deliberation, from New York—Gombarov had become a frequenter of the restaurant to which Molly had introduced him. Observation of types served his detachment, drew his mind from himself and his troubles. He saw that, whatever else may be said of the sadness and sordidness of the life he observed, it could not be denied that the wretches who lived this life employed not a little courage and fortitude in living it. They were surely, apart from poor artists, the only class in Christian society who followed the Nazarene's injunction to take no thought of the morrow, and that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

He sat there, sometimes hours on a stretch, and watched them coming and going. Tired and cold and wretched, from walking their rounds in the worst of weathers, with bare throats and the thinnest of stockings and shoes, they would come in, hands numbed with cold, to seek a respite in the comfortless fare of poor tea or worse coffee.

Though he talked to many of them, he seldom heard them complain. They neither asked nor received pity. They were true philosophers, and accepted life stoically. They had their good and their bad days, but whether they were festively gay or sat as symbols of utter dejection and abandonment, their child-like nature was nearly always clearly in evidence. There was irony in the fact that these had been chosen as humanity's sacrifices to the God of virtue in wives, for served they not, these rejected, as safety valves to keep the rest of society respectable? Thus Gombarov reflected, and he found com-

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fort here that he could not find among so-called respectable persons.

Not that all the girls he met there were of the type of Molly, Anita or Kathleen. They differed, as to class and breeding, even as the rest of humanity differs. And there were lives here inexplicable in their motives even as among other human beings. Such was Judith, a Jewess, who, as he learnt later, was born of a family marked for fatality and misfortune. Judith was a curious, complex type, not to be explained by economics alone, though need may have been the final motive in pushing her into a life of degradation. She did not appear to have a "pal," but usually sat alone, reading a book. She was commonly referred to by the others as "Sarah" or "the Jew girl." She was tall, well-formed, with a wealth of black hair, a skin that seemed tanned by the sun, a slightly drooping aquiline nose and large dark eyes, which at moments lit up with a molten expressiveness, of dreaminess, sadness or pride. Unlike the others, she never appeared openly to solicit a man's acquaintance, and he had seen her refuse to talk to a man she did not like. It was not without hesitation that he addressed her one day, encouraged by the presence at her side of a volume of selections from Swinburne. They happened to be sitting at the same table, at an angle from one another.

"Fine poet!" he opened the conversation.

"Do you know him?" she asked, her astonished eyes lighting up on finding another curious creature acquainted with her favourite poet.

"Do you know this?"—and to her greater astonishment, he recited the opening lines of "A Forsaken Garden."

The next two hours passed in a discussion of favourite writers and certain current problems. She was an ardent social-

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ist, but no suffragist. Only in short snatches did they touch upon intimacies.

"I'd like to meet you again!" she said, as she rose to go and warmly pressed his hand.

"Have tea with me here to-morrow."

They met several times in the course of the next fortnight, but for all his manoeuvring he knew at the end as little of her life as when he first met her.

"Don't let's talk about trifles, John!" she parried two or three deliberate questions.

He had a curious feeling that she liked him and wanted to save him the ordeal of painful revelations. He had given up hope of finding out anything about her, when one afternoon she came by appointment to tea and said without sitting down:

"Come along, and have tea with me in my own little room, that is, if you don't mind going by 'bus all the way to Mile End Road."

Once on the rear seat on top of the 'bus, she said:

"You'll find my mother a bit queer, but don't mind her. She's had a hard time, poor thing, and it's turned her head, I'm afraid. I suppose I had better tell you something about it. I've already told you that I was born in Russia, and was a mere kiddie when I left. It was all due to a pogrom in our village. My father, a fine honest man, a Hebrew tutor by trade, was killed. My mother, then young, pretty and happy, was violated by a brute of a muzhik. Poor mother, gathering up what goods she had and selling what she could, scraped enough money together to bring us to England—that is, me and an older sister, Ruth. As a result of mother's misfortune, another child was born when she got here, a little girl, with an unknown muzhik for a father! Fancy my mother's

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predicament! She did not know whether to love or hate Haggie, as we called Hagar. There were two bloods in her, and one a hated blood. Poor Hagar! I don't know for whom I was sorry more—mother or Hagar. For, when all is said and done, neither was responsible for what had happened. Who was to blame? It was hard, especially when you had been taught to believe that your God could do no wrong! And mother, as the wife of a Hebrew tutor, had been a great believer in her day. Something had happened to her the day her God had let her down. What was the good of saying in your misfortune, 'Everything is for the best'? What was the good of saying, 'The Lord will provide,' when she spent the rest of her life in an alien land, slaving for three daughters, one an unwanted one! And she never mentioned the Lord since that unhappy night, the night of the pogrom. There was Hagar to remind her every day of that terrible tragedy in the cold darkness of a Russian winter night.

"Well, we grew up! Haggie, poor dear, was a very handsome girl, more Russian than Jewish in feature, but with sad Jewish eyes! You know, you can always tell a Jew by his eyes! You'd have to go a long way to find a handsomer girl than Haggie. She was both gentle and impetuous, extremely sad or extremely gay. In fact, she was extreme in all things. When she was eighteen she found a position in a tobacconist's shop in the West End, and it was there, while waiting on customers, that she met a gentleman, a racing man, who was greatly taken with her and paid court to her. He was quite gone on her and took her to the best theatres and restaurants and lavished every attention upon her. She also took a great fancy to him, and it was not long before she gave herself up to him, body and soul. There was this to be said for him: he was kindness itself to her. And she was very happy.

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Strange to say—or, perhaps, it was not so strange, after all—when Haggie told mother—for Haggie had a very frank nature—mother neither said anything nor protested in any way. I suppose she thought: that was to have been expected of a blood tainted with the blood of a Russian savage. Besides, since there was no longer any God—her God having died in the cold darkness of that terrible Russian night—what did it matter? Stranger still, Hagar's own nature, under the influence of her love, seemed to undergo an interesting change. She lost all her impetuosity, and became as gentle and as kind—well, simply an angel! Apart from her love, her thoughts seemed to be all for us. Of her own free will she gave mother what money her lover gave her, or bought dresses and presents for me. Only Ruth would have nothing to do with her. Ruth, I may tell you, is the pious member of the family. If you meet her, you will see for yourself. What a family! . . .”

As if overcome by her memories, Judith paused, and a thin veil of moisture was visible in her eyes. She leaned a little against her companion, and her hand almost automatically slipped into his; she seemed to derive strength from the contact. He seized her hand and held it firm, and by an effort of the will experienced the curious consciousness of active strength surging in his blood, downward from his shoulder to his finger-tips, infusing the girl with it. He had an intense desire to give, give, give, as much as possible of this sudden-born strength, drawn up from unsuspected wells in him by some quality in the girl herself. She must have divined something of what was going on within him, for she smiled faintly, and impulsively seizing his hand kissed it gently and fervently.

“You are a dear,” she said. “I can go on now!”

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A moisture crept into his eyes, but he controlled himself, while she resumed:

"Hagar's affair went on for a full year, at the end of which she was more in love with her Larry than at the beginning. He, too, seemed attached to her. Then one day he told her that at the doctor's orders he must take a month's holiday. He explained that he could not take her with him, as he was going to spend the time with his family in the country. It did break my heart to see her pining away for her Larry. The shock came five weeks later. He wrote her saying that he had just been married and he enclosed a hundred-pound cheque, adding that he would see that she was not in want. Poor Haggie never touched that cheque, but just pined away. Weakened by insufficient nourishment, she caught a cold, which developed into pneumonia. Even mother, hardened as she was against misfortune, was touched. Well, some days later mother got me to write a letter to Larry, asking him to call before a certain date, to see Haggie for the last time, as Haggie was going away to a distant country. . . .

"Larry came and I took him into Haggie's bedroom, where Haggie, all in white like a bride, was lying in her coffin. Larry stood there, as white as a ghost, looking at her, and I couldn't help saying to him: 'That's your work, Larry!' He said with tears in his voice: 'But I meant to have done things for her. She need never have been in want!' I went to the table and drew an envelope out of a box, in which Haggie kept her few treasures, and handed it to him. He drew out the cheque he had sent her. 'Haggie kept it for you,' said I, 'she wouldn't touch it!' I must say for him that he was badly broken up. He couldn't say a word. He just kept looking at her, then bent down and kissed her lips, and walked out of the room, without even saying good-bye!

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A day or two later he wrote to me, begging forgiveness, and saying that he hadn't realised until too late how Haggie had loved him, and how he had loved her. If he had, things would have been different! There it is: that 'Too late!' Life is so full of 'Too lates'! There was also mother who realised too late what a treasure Hagar had been. And she lapsed into a state of melancholia and remorse. Too late! So it is with all of us. We do not miss what treasure there is around us until it is gone. Too late! Too late! Too late!" . . .

She lapsed into silence, and Gombarov again pressed her hand and tried to infuse her with his strength, but she rose impetuously and said:

"Let's walk the rest of the way. It's so difficult to talk here!"

His hand clutching her arm, they walked for some minutes in silence, during which she seemed to be gathering herself for the final revelations.

"Do you know," she said with a fierce outburst, "you, too, in a way, have come too late!"

"What do you mean?" he asked, seeing that she was silent again.

"Don't you see," she said, impetuously, "what my home was like and what drove me to this! There was mother getting more and more queer. There was my pious, austere sister. There was the tragedy of Hagar hanging over the house, and all that came before it! Who would come to our house under the circumstances? It was enough to drive the sanest person mad. And there was I, pining for life, for love, for friendship, sometimes just for some one to talk to! I had read a lot, and was burning to do things. Perhaps, if I had remained in Russia I should have been a revolutionary. Who knows, maybe even a bomb-thrower! I chafe under in-

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justice. And here I was shut up in that house, between those two gloomy persons, in the fatalistic atmosphere of tragedy. There's just that something about the house that makes you want to go to the devil, it doesn't matter how! I was all burning up with myself and my desires. I couldn't, like Ruth, stick it in a shop or factory and lead a humdrum existence. Yet one must live, as they say. If there had been only one intelligent person to talk to—someone like yourself—if only you could have come sometimes, then, maybe I should not have chucked myself at the first passer-by. Oh, that house of ours! It was enough to corrupt an angel!" . . .

Even while she was talking, it suddenly, in a flash, occurred to Gombarov that, in telling her story and in taking him to her home, her whole object was to justify herself before him, more than that, to justify herself before herself. She had a moral need of this justification.

". . . Why do I talk to you?" she went on. "I don't know. I've never had the chance to talk like this to anyone. But you remember the first instant you spoke to me. Well, I felt like a wanderer who had wandered for a thousand years and somewhere in this huge desert of our life met just another such wanderer, for I knew that you, too, had suffered. I knew it the instant you spoke. . . ."

"Surely," he interrupted her, "it is not too late for you to begin a new life. You are young, you are beautiful, and you know so much. . . ."

"No, no! It is too late. I once hungered for a superior being. I felt I could have inspired an artist!"

"You still could. You have an unusual, stimulating mind."

"No, no! It's not that I mean at all. I mean with my body, the love and drunkenness of the body. Do you understand? With my body. People do not understand the body.

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What a wonderful, wonderful thing the body is. But now it's too late, too late! My body is tainted. It is no longer a pure wine, but is a thing mixed up with gall, poison and wormwood. Oh, no, I'm not what you would call a trimmed lamp! Oh, this civilisation!" she cried with fury. "When I walk in Piccadilly and see the great herd pass by, I feel as though I'd like to press a button and send it all flying in a billion fragments into space, myself with it!"

Gombarov had a tight grip on her arm and was silent. He was helpless before this volcano of sputtering fire. He felt a sacredness in her flame, now turned to derision, against herself. Even now there were stray, clear, passionate threads in her flame, which stirred a strange thought in him: "Yes, why shouldn't I take her even now and cut loose from Winifred, who doesn't want me? We are, both of us, of the hurt things of the world, and we can soothe one another with the pity of hurt things. Is not pity the greater love, seeking as it does to shelter and protect, giving little thought to self? Is not the thing men call love an unconscious desire to destroy the one they love, even as I have often, with my loving, desired to destroy Winifred?" This thought struggled in him, and was smothered by worldly after-thoughts, for he knew his mind to have been tainted and prostituted by the world, even as Judith was conscious of the tainting and prostituting of her body. He said aloud:

"Judith, why don't you find something to do that would suit your temperament? I have an idea you'd make a fine actress!"

Judith only laughed. "Do you realise," she said with some vehemence, "what it means to become an actress nowadays? Do you suppose one is chosen just for one's potentialities, however great these may be? You must have a moneyed

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backer, and you must be a nice bit of fluff at the service of your benefactor. Not that I'd object to that for the sake of my art, but I'm not the type at all that would appeal to a modern impresario. A mechanical doll is what they want. How many get through to the top, when they can dispose of themselves as they like? How many fall? Well, you've heard Anita's story! Do you know, I once actually applied for a small part in legitimate drama. What is more, the manager engaged me. Then the leading lady came along and as soon as she saw me, she got me fired, for no reason at all except that I was too tall and too strikingly dark, and she wanted a few fair-headed wooden figures in the background to set her off!"

She lapsed into silence, then resumed:

"Given a man a woman can love, she may, of course, bear children. But that also is too late, even if the right man turned up. For now I am tainted with many bloods. Nature is against the woman all the time. A man may lead the very deuce of a life and in the end find a woman who is his mate, but when a woman tries that sort of thing she's lost! No amount of suffragism will overcome that. The worst of this wanting to live is that if you are thwarted you want to die. That's what drove me out of that accursed house to destroy myself. Forgive me for talking like this. Well, I have given you an afternoon! You are a dear to listen," and once more she caught up his hand impetuously and kissed it. "Now let's try and be cheerful. We are nearly there now!"

"Poor little Judith, poor little Judith. . . . I wish I could help you!"

"Here we are!"—and they paused before a small two-story house.

As they entered the hall, the kitchen door near the stairs

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slightly opened, and a woman's wrinkled face, with strange, half-demented eyes, peered through the opening.

"It's only me, mother!" said Judith.

The door opened wider and the woman stepped into the hall, a little, warped figure, whom the ills of a mutilated world had in some way marked as their symbol. And it was hard to tell whether it was malignant or kindly. Two dark eyes, in a prematurely aged face, turned upon the stranger a fixed glitter, accentuated by a drab, ill-fitting wig, the emblem among Orthodox Jews of a married woman, and from the wig emerged the sharp contours of emaciated high cheekbones and sharp nose and chin. Yet Judith had said that she had been pretty once, had loved husband and children, and had drudged her life away to bring up three daughters. Where was the nobility of sorrow? Here was but a shrivelled, gargoyleish old woman, who had lost her belief in God and eternity.

"See that the young man pays well," said she in a dull, hollow voice, in Yiddish.

"Don't talk like that, mother," said Judith. "This man is not a *goi*. He is a Yid, and a friend."

She shuffled back into the kitchen, muttering.

"Poor thing! She can't help herself," said Judith. "Let's go up to my little den."

"Poor little Judith!" he whispered, pressing her hand, and followed her upstairs.

"Look in," she said, opening the first door on the landing. "That's Haggie's room. She died there. It's not been occupied since."

Everything was clean and neat here, and the bed was made up as usual, but there was all the mustiness and cheerlessness of a room that had had neither occupant nor fire for some time. Possibly, because he was familiar with Hagar's story,

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it assumed a peculiar and poignant emptiness, which brought sadness to the heart.

Judith's den was next door. This was a larger, a cosier room, containing in one corner a broad divan instead of a bed, covered over with coloured draperies. Familiar portraits of Shelley, Turgenev, Byron and Tolstoy hung on the walls. There was a shelf of books, mostly poets and novelists. Everything in the room showed a measure of refined simplicity, with pleasing feminine touches.

"What do you think of it?" she asked, drawing her gloves off.

"It's jolly. Looks almost like a studio."

"Yes, it helps me to forget the house. Have a cigarette. You'll find them in the box on the table. Then sit down in the big chair. You might light the fire, if you will."

All that he saw pleased him, and he was pleased with her.

"Why not?" he asked himself again. One might do worse than take this girl and make his home with her. That is, not in this house, but elsewhere, away from familiar environment.

He sat in the big chair and watched the fire in the grate. She sat facing him, on the other side of the grate. Outside, the December daylight died away, and the firelight reflected its warm orange tints in the faces of man and girl, intensifying their expressions, all the rest being more or less lost in darkness and shadows.

"Would you like to have light?"

"No, Judith, I prefer it as it is. And you?"

"I, too, prefer it."

She was intently watching his face, immobile with the changeless sadness of eternity.

"You look like a statue of Grief," she said, a smile in her voice. "What a sad face you have! I fear that I've made

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you sad. Don't be sad, honey!" She dropped on her knees on the rug at his feet and looked steadily into his face. "That's right, honey, smile! Let's be happy!" And impetuously she sprang to her feet, as a sudden idea seemed to strike her. "I'll be back in a few moments!" She ran out of the room.

Presently he heard her movements in Hagar's room. Five minutes elapsed, and she reappeared, dressed in a Japanese kimono, her bare ankles showing above the dainty soft house-slippers, her lovely black hair luxuriantly streaming down her shoulders, and covering her breasts, the V-shaped opening exposing the little valley between. The fire lighted up the beautiful apparition, and her smiling face, catching and reflecting the orange glow as the tints of some dream sunset, was an island of delight surrounded by a sea of black hair. She stood thus for a few moments facing the fire, then walked to the back of his chair, and bending over him, so that her hair covered his face, whispered:

"Don't be sad, honey! Would you like to love me—just a little? You may if you want to."

The warm perfume of her body and her warm whispered words and her hair brushing his face smothered him under their allurements, but that terrible all-comprehending sadness, blended of diverse thoughts—thoughts of Hagar, of this tragic house, of the half-demented woman downstairs, of the infinite pathos of this poor, abandoned, life-yearning girl, and of other sad things—held his will, and he found no answer. Again, with that contradictory, conflicting nature of his, reasoning, yet credulous of inscrutable active forces, of those ironic mysteries which dog men's footsteps to their undoing, he was seized with one of those sudden inexplicable forebodings, springing out of nowhere in life's crises, warning him in this instance that upon the present test depended the

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nature of Winifred's answer and that if he wished it to be favourable, it was for him, at all hazards, to resist this almost irresistible challenge of the Fates, of which the girl was an instrument. This feeling arose from past experiences. Again, he wondered: was Judith merely being kind to him? Her impulsive manner before the transformation suggested, perhaps, that she wanted to make amends for having been the cause of his great sadness. And he sat there, fiercely tempted, and made no answer.

"Don't you want to?" asked the puzzled girl.

"Judith . . ." he began.

She stood up and went in front of the fire. She let the kimono slip from her to the rug, and was revealed to him in all her natural beauty, without civilised artifices. She stood up proud and erect, firm-breasted, and there was in her manner the pride of the female; and the firelight invested her colouring and contours with a quality of animated alabaster.

"Am I not sufficiently beautiful?" she asked, turning round as on a pivot. "Don't I please you? Am I incapable of loving or being loved? . . ."

"Good God!" he exclaimed, and there was something so poignant in his cry that she immediately desisted, and donning the kimono, squatted down on the rug and looked into his face.

"Judith, put your beautiful head on my knees and let me talk to you."

She obeyed submissively.

"Judith," he said as he stroked her hair, "you are, indeed, beautiful; so beautiful that I would willingly and in all humility fall on my knees before your beauty and kiss your dear feet. I am human. It is all I can do to resist you. I feel a tenderness for you quite apart from that, a sort of

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detached tenderness. Please don't think ill of me, but I can't quite tell you why I must resist you; at all events, for the present." He hated himself for having said this. "And I am sad, very sad, you don't know how sad! And very tired. Wait a little. I may have need of you. I don't know, perhaps I will come to you and take you all for my own, for always. Wait a little. Please do not tempt me now. I can hardly resist you as it is." And he pressed his lips to hers with a fervour that took his strength. He talked a great deal more to her in the same vein, and hated himself for it. Did it sound like cant to her? He wondered.

"Never mind, darling. You are a queer one, and I like you all the better for it," she hastened to reassure him, seeing that he was in torment. "Read me 'A Forsaken Garden,' but I think you said you knew it by heart." She rose and gracefully curling herself up in her kimono on the divan, fixed her eyes on him and listened.

He recited the poem with a peculiar intensity. The nerves of his body were as taut strings of a musical instrument, and it was with his whole body, with the whole vibrancy of his mad intoxicated, self-thwarted body, that he poured out his pent-up feelings into an already emotionally pent-up poem, and each time he raised his eyes he found Judith's intent on him with wonder. When the last line, "Death lies dead," had been said, a supine silence fell upon them, and in the silence slow dragging footsteps were heard on the stairs. There was a knock on the door, given with a foot.

"Do open the door," said Judith. "Be a dear!"

It was the old woman, her mother, bringing the tea on a tray. She was a witch in that firelight, and the steady glitter of her eyes was the glitter of the eyes of the damned in

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hell. And yet, as before, it was hard to tell whether those eyes were malignant or kindly. As, in that silence, he took in the whole scene, it seemed to him that the whole tragedy of the world was symbolised in these female figures in the fire-light: all faith lost, mother-love crushed, become a mockery; young creative fires thwarted, turned against that beautiful body for its disintegration. There was himself, too, consumed with aspirations, yet a mere beggar, a snatcher of Life's dropped crumbs. He watched the grotesque figure shuffle out of the room, and his compassionate thoughts rose and fell in that silence, like sea-birds on the crests of incoming waves.

Judith lay there, without changing the decorative gesture of her body, and watched his face out of her large dark eyes. Then, impetuously, she sprang up and busied herself over the tea tray. She laughed.

"I do believe mother has taken a fancy to you. Do you know, she has actually brought up some Russian tea, with lemon, and home-made jam and Jewish cookies. She's never done that before when I was entertaining a gentleman. Mother is a good sort at bottom, when she has the chance. Who'd have thought that she'd take a fancy to you? . . ."

Something gave way in Gombarov, for suddenly leaning his elbows on his knees and burying his face in his hands, he wept.

What was it that made him weep, so suddenly and unexpectedly? Was it the tragic phantasmagoria, blurredly passing that afternoon before the hidden tears of his soul and suddenly, through those tears, bursting into tragic rainbows of light and colour, overwhelming the visible body of him and now expressing itself in visible tears? Was it the revealed bodily beauty of that girl, a world so unexpectedly offered up to



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him, and for him to command, and his wise or foolish renunciation of it? Was it the drunken ecstasy with which he poured himself into that drunken poem? Was it the unlooked-for and inexpressibly beautiful spark of goodness emanating from so unpromising a source as that witch-like old woman? It was all these things—and more. Great sorrow weeps from great depths, and the woes of this world may sound through the tears of but two eyes, or through the music of a blind man's reed, or in the woeful moan of the wind blowing on a winter night through the narrow crevice between two hovels. Suppressed sobs came at intervals, while he thus wept.

Judith jumped to his side and getting down on one knee, took hold of his head. "Don't cry, honey, don't cry. Now, darling, put your dear head here," and she opened her kimono, and drew his head so that it rested on her bosom, and his tears trickled down the little valley between her breasts.

He soon felt soothed, and he no longer wept.

"Here, honey," she said, as he rested quietly, "I'll be a little mother to you." And swaying her body slightly from side to side, she began singing the wordless tune of an old Russian lullaby that his mother used to sing in his childhood days, and as he looked up, shamefaced, into her eyes he found her smiling happily, with a joy he had not seen in her before.

"You *are* an angel!" he said, at last, as she rose to pour out the tea. "Maybe you are a fallen angel, but still an angel. And I suppose," he laughed, "that I must be a fallen devil. I am moved and fascinated by evil, but active good touches me in an unexpected way."

"There! You've struck the nail on the head. I can't stand goodness, or goody-goody people. Puritans have made goodness a wicked thing, indeed! But active goodness is quite another

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thing. Only by becoming active, in the way you mean, can it become more fascinating than evil. Christ was the best example of that. . . .”

Thus they talked on of the mysteries of creation, of good and evil, of life and death. . . .

“I’ve had a most wonderful afternoon!” said Judith, when he rose to depart.

“So have I!”

Spontaneously they embraced, and he kissed her hair and her eyes and hands.

She led the way downstairs. The door of the front room was open. The room was lit up by a small seven-canded candelabra, and before it, her hands spread across the light of the candles, stood a young woman, like an austere shadow, praying. It was Ruth, blessing the candles, on the eve of Sabbath.

Judith opened the front door, and, kissing the tips of her fingers of both hands, he went out. He looked back and saw her standing in the doorway, her eyes following him. Then he disappeared round the corner.

A half hour afterwards he found himself caught up in the traffic of diners and playgoers in Piccadilly. In a lost way he stood on the Shaftesbury side of the Pavilion and watched the slow passage of taxis and huge private cars containing men in evening dress smoking cigars and richly attired women with jewelry in their hair, and as he thought of Judith a wrath rose up within him, and, like Judith, he wished there were a button to press, whereby he could send all this world, himself included, flying in a billion fragments into space.

He did not see Judith for ten days, when one morning he received a wire from her, saying that her mother was ill and begging him to come in the afternoon.

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"Sh-h! Go quietly!" said Judith, unusually pale. "Mother has had a relapse. I think the dear is dying. The doctor just left. He didn't think she'd live through the day. Ruth is with her. Ruth wanted to fetch the Rabbi, but mother refuses to hear of it, and abuses her frightfully when she mentions it. She breaks out into queer fits and says the most impossible things. She's quiet just now. Come in, and see her, if you don't mind. Your presence might stop her from saying those awful things. And it will help me to see you there. Please don't mind what she says."

On tip-toe they made their way to the back room on the ground-floor, and, pushing aside the draperies, Judith peeped in and motioned him to follow. His face was pale, and he tried to control the trembling of his body. She pointed to a seat near the door, at the farthest angle from the bed, and herself sat down between him and the austere but not unattractive Ruth, who was sitting at the bedside, watching the pale, immobile face of her mother. The old woman lay on her back, her face upward, and the only sign of life was the motionless glitter of her eyes, fixed on the ceiling. As it presently proved, she was only gathering strength for a new onslaught. Not many minutes elapsed, when with a startling unexpectedness, she turned full face upon Ruth, and addressed her in virulent Yiddish:

"What's the good of it, what's the good of it? I ask you. What's the good of toiling the days of one's life, like a slave? Day after day in a wretched workshop! Look at yourself in a mirror! What do you look like? Tell me. And how pale you look! And thin! If you go on, you'll be nothing but skin and bones! Look at your hands! It's a shame for a young girl to have such hard, cut-up hands. Saving yourself up for a young man? What young man will have you? Young

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men are not fools! Look at Judith! Judith knows how to live. . . .”

“Don’t, mother!” cried Ruth. “Judith has her life, and I have mine!”

“Look at Judith!” went on the old woman, relentlessly, raising her hoarse voice. “Judith has nice dresses, Judith is gay, Judith has young men come to see her, Judith’s cheeks are like two red apples. . . . What’s the good of it, I ask you, living like this? Go to the streets, I tell you . . . to the streets!” she shouted, raising herself from the pillow. “What are you waiting for? For the Messiah to come? Too long have we Jews waited for the Messiah! Too long! Your own mother tells you to do that! Do you hear? Your own mother! Three daughters your mother has brought into the world . . . three daughters! Oh, woe is me! . . . One was brought into the world by a *goi* and killed by a *goi*! God was merciful to her! But Judith is clever! She’ll let no man kill her. She’ll make them pay, too, for a nice living! But you! What are you waiting for? Go into the streets, I tell you. Judith is clever, she’ll show you how. She’ll start you off! Ah, young man!” she appealed, fixing her eyes on Gombarov. “You are a man of the world. You know something about life! Tell her what a little fool she is, to be wearing herself out. To the streets, I say! There are plenty of young men who . . .”

Much to the relief of all, she had exhausted herself and fell back on to the pillow, but she went on faintly muttering:

“To the streets . . . the streets. . . .”

And again a silence fell upon the room.

Gombarov, his body trembling, tried to find a ray among his dimmed, confused thoughts that would explain this mystery of the warping of a soul, and at last he found a bright spark

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that illumined his whole brain, and thence conveyed its light to the heart. Pathetic and sad as all this was, yet, he reflected, there was something truly magnificent in the blasphemous old woman's dying gesture. That was her way, even in her last gasp, of defying the gods, who had treated her so cruelly. She was hitting out her feeble shrunken fists in the face of her one-time God! What a noble impulse was here, urging her to evil!

Presently, the old woman showing signs of life again, Judith bent towards her sister, who was holding her face in her hands, and whispered:

"Tell her yes, when she begins again. It won't cost you anything!"

Ruth shook her head negatively.


"You can't fool me!" cried the old woman, raising her head from the pillow. In spite of her half-comatose condition, she seemed to know and hear everything. "To the streets, I say! . . . the streets. . . ."

Seized, at last, with a sudden pain, she screwed up her face, curved her body upward, with a violent twist, and her head fell backward, chin up. Her eyes gave a rolling motion, like the eyes of a mechanical doll, a quick, struggling flutter, flashed white and black, and suddenly stood still with a lifeless stare. The mad glitter was gone.

Judith rose and went over to the bedside. For some moments she stood looking down on her mother, then busied herself in arranging her mother's head and hands, to give the dead an appearance of ultimate decorum.

Gombarov left Judith two hours later, after accompanying her to various Jewish dignitaries, associated with the burial of the dead.

Shaken by the ordeal, a quixotic thought stirred in him. In



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the event of a negative answer from Winifred, he would ask Judith to come away with him; he would reclaim her from the degradation into which her tragic fate had driven and directed her will.

CHAPTER IX: LIFE'S CHESSBOARD: A YEAR'S MOVES

*"What's the use of being a King
without a Queen?"*
—Jew (over chessboard) in an
American burlesque.

THE QUEEN STILL THERE

No, the Queen on Gombarov's chessboard was not yet lost. He had thought her as good as lost, when she had been merely in jeopardy. Now, one may have pawns and bishops and castles and knights, but there is no comfort for a King without a Queen. Thus it is for a King in life, or for a King on a chessboard. His final move in writing to Winifred at Naples did the trick, saved the Queen.

One morning in January a letter arrived from New York, conveying Winifred's intention to stand by him. Her surrender was complete and unconditional. The Fates that had driven him to make his desperate move were beneficent, by this move his position was considerably strengthened.

"I am writing today," her letter ran, "to say that, if you still want me, I give myself entirely to you, John, my own. . . It is a wonderful moment, for I am seeing things finely and clearly. . . . I seem to have come out of a horrible mist, and now I know that you are all I have ever wanted. . . . I would do anything in the world for you. . . . I wonder if we can see enough of one another before we die. . . . There is so much to say to make up for those dreadful months. When we left Paris and wandered through Italy I thought that you

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hated me, and when your letters came in Naples I could hardly adjust myself so quickly. I almost wrote then, but thought it would be better to obey you and wait. On the boat I regretted very much that I didn't. . . . Suppose, I thought, the vessel should sink. . . . Then you might never know how much I cared. . . . Pray, forgive me for all the trouble I've given you. . . . And remember that I am married to you now in spirit—and from today—if you will have me, my own John! . . .”

The morning the letter arrived was dark with fog, and London, lit up with gas lights, bore the aspect of neither night nor day, but as of some unnatural night, fraught with dual impulses and counter-impulses, waging an invisible war for the city's soul. The sun rose for a short space, red like a goaded moon, and, as if maddened by its humiliation, sank again into oblivion, its frank, blazing masculinity refusing to compromise with the dark temptress. “All or nothing!” it seemed to say, and sank out of sight to allow the dark one to have her sway. The unnatural darkness had to be content with the caresses of petty flares of gaslight; a cold, unnatural lover was that motionless darkness, caressed by thousands of petty flares.

Thus it was with Gombarov's soul, in which day and night struggled, as too much wrought up he went out to seek his breakfast and to adjust himself to the news. He was elated, but was not filled with elation. He had won, but why did not the sun rise on his victory, fill him with its abundant light? That unnatural darkness, caressed by thousands of petty flames, was his own inner self, filled with flaming broodings. It was strange, but half of him almost wished that he had lost. He had been prepared for defeat, he had been making up his mind to join hands with the defeated Judith, and it was curious to reflect that this prospect of defeat and of

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joining hands with the defeated held out an attraction hardly less than that of victory. It would have been, in its own way, a victory. It was irritating to be a thinking modern, with a soul floundering in its own many doubts. Sacred and profane love? Indeed! Which was which?

He went on thinking these thoughts in a gas-lit A. B. C. shop, between mouthfuls of porridge.

"Damn it!" he said to himself. "What a complexity, what a network of thoughts and impulses and desires civilisation makes of man, pulling him now in this direction, now in that! What am I at bottom? Which of these things is the real I? What do I want? Where am I going? Which way should I go? . . . Once I knew what I wanted. . . ."

He smiled enigmatically, and resumed his monologue:

". . . To know oneself, to have but one thought, to be fanatical is good. It is to be harnessed to a tiger, to have all the fury and energy of a tiger! To have many thoughts is to divide one's strength. It is to be harnessed to an army of fleas, dragging in different directions. It is to feel oneself falling apart. . . ."

"I had once thought civilisation was Janus-faced. It is really more than that: it is multiple-faced. It is like that multiple-breasted woman, or that multiple-armed man sculptured by the ancients. It is moved by a thousand wills, and a thousand wills are worse than none. They are wills for mutual destruction, self-destruction. . . ."

His thoughts paused before a mental wall, seemed to surmount that wall, and went on:

"Civilisation is Babel, and every civilised man today is a Babel in himself, since he bears all this world in his soul. I am Babel, a full-thoughted, tottering modern man, and only the tiger in my soul now and then peeps out of his cage and

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gazes with pity or hatred at the civilised but godless world that has so caught him and caged him. . . .”

He suddenly observed that the fog was lifting, the lights in the restaurant went out. Outside Gombarov found that a fresh breeze had sprung up. Every vestige of the fog was gone, the air was rosy with sunlight, and full of soft tremors, like a caressed virgin. A sudden and overpowering elation seized him, swept away his doubts, and all his thought went out to Winifred, now his once more.

It was not astonishing that he should have entertained depressing thoughts, for now, in the reaction following his ordeal and conflict of weeks, he felt a sheer physical weariness, and now and then he pulled up with a sharp pain in his back. For days a hardness as of a huge boil or ulcer had been developing at the waist near the spine. “I must see a doctor!” he decided.

That same afternoon he went to a doctor, recommended to him by Julius. The doctor, a portly, good-natured man, examined the sore spot, and said:

“It’s a bad one! I’m afraid it can’t be lanced. It will have to be cut out. It’s near the bone. Your blood is in a bad condition. Have you been worrying?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so! A girl, I suppose. . . .”

“Yes, and other things besides.”

“You said you were an author. You have a highly developed nervous system. You are like a fine, sensitive machine. That means you’ve got to take good care of it! Oil it properly, and keep the dust off. Can you afford to go to a nursing home, or do you prefer a hospital? If you go to a hospital, it will cost you nothing.”

“Yes, I’d prefer that!”



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The doctor sat down at his desk and wrote a note, which he handed to Gombarov.

"If you will present it at the hospital to which it is addressed, you will be admitted and given a bed. Go tomorrow, and I'll operate the day after. You may have to remain a fortnight or so."

"I appreciate your kindness. And what do I owe you for this visit?"

"Nothing!" replied the doctor, who was an expensive practitioner. "Consider me," he laughed, "a patron of the arts. Still, if you like you can send me a copy of your book, when you write one. I have a weakness for struggling authors."

A RESPITE FROM THE CHESSBOARD

"Go ahead, I'm ready for the smelling salts!" exclaimed Gombarov, jocularly, from the operating table.

Sister Angela, Little Sister of the Poor, held one of his hands, while the doctor was attaching a tube, with a contrivance at one end of it to fit over the patient's nose.

"Now, breathe in!" said the doctor, in a cheery voice.

Gombarov breathed in great whiffs of anaesthetic, and soon felt a fierce rushing of blood; it seemed as if he were lying on a battlefield, and a regiment of cavalry dashed across his chest. He felt as if he were dying, and curiously enough, he experienced no regrets at leaving the world. His hand, drunken with a kind of last passion, gripped tightly the hand of Sister Angela.

He remembered no more, until he quietly opened his eyes in his bed in a large room containing many beds and looked up at the white ceiling with a serenity he had not known before. He did not know how long he had been looking thus, when, closing his eyes for an instant in delicious relaxation, he

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reopened them to find himself gazing into two large grey-blue eyes, the most serene he had ever beheld. They were Sister Angela's, and they faintly smiled at him.

"How is the poet?" he heard her whisper. She called him the poet, and his bed the poet's corner.

"He is in love!" he answered, serenely smiling.

"She is a lucky girl!" laughed Sister Angela.

"No, no, I don't mean that! He is in love with a Queen!"

"A Queen?"

"Yes! The Queen who rules over the Seventh Heaven!"

"You can't have seen her!"

"I'm looking at her now! And she is called Sister Angela!"

"Go on with your blarney!" said Sister Angela, who was an Irishwoman of about thirty-two, chastely attractive, like a Holbein portrait. "So the poet is in love!" she laughed again, and ran her fingers through his longish dark hair, and, still laughing, walked away.

He watched her tall, austere, hooded figure making the rounds of the beds. She moved with dignity, indeed like a queen not of this earth. There was in her stately movements a kind of serene detachment, a kind of pitying aloofness; even in the pursuit of the most menial and disagreeable tasks—tasks which would have made any woman but a lover quail—yet conferring upon them a dignity beside which the dignities of a king's palace were as empty formalities. She might have served as a model for the *Pietà*, holding the head of Jesus in her lap. With all her aloofness, heightened by the austerity of her robes and the chaste outlines of her face, she was a vessel containing the distilled essences of love, which she dispensed to many, to Jew, Christian and pagan alike, and which diminished not with the giving. There was no false solemnity about her, and, being Irish, she was not above



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exchanging a joke. He loved her mere presence, for the serenity it evoked; it stilled all the storms and turbulences of his soul, which became like a mirrored lake of quiet waters, and not a single movement or gesture of hers but went to the making of his peace. She charmed the latent tiger in him, subjected him, perhaps, to some spiritual anaesthetic of her own. All those weeks of stress now appeared to have occurred years ago, seemed to recede into some vast and distant background, as tides of memories on the shores of life recede into the oblivion of vast seas of forgetfulness. The figures of Molly, Anita, Kathleen and Judith became as non-existent, imagined figures, somewhere lost in the depths of the vast serenity of his unrippled soul. These days in bed were his first holiday in years, and a quiet happiness pervaded him, a happiness he had not known before. He smiled at the irony of it.

There was no boredom in the monotony of his day's routine. He would wake at five or six in the morning and lie in bed, contemplating out of the window the delicate traceries of trees outlined in the grey-blue haze of winter dawn, and these mystic patterns, lovely as the visions of old Chinese paintings, grafted themselves upon his sensitive frame and permeated him with their serene spirit. Voices would rise here and there from the beds, but lost in contemplation, he did not trouble about them. Presently Sister Angela would come in, and everything would grow quiet again. Her hooded form would, in the semi-darkness, drop on its knees in the middle of the room, facing the large crucifix on the distant wall and in a clear vibrant voice pronounce a Latin formula, only an occasional word of which he understood; but, uttered by Sister Angela, it sounded like a mysterious incantation, its mere utterance being a blessing in itself, apart from any

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blessing it was doubtless intended to invoke of an invisible deity.

Then she would rise, and simultaneously the lights would go up. Gombarov's being Bed Number One, she would start her tasks by attending to him, putting up a screen round the bed as a preliminary. Then a colloquy would follow:

"Good morning, Sister Angela. It's good to see you again!"

"And how is the poet this morning?"

"Very sad, Sister Angela!"

"Sad at seeing me, poet!"

"Heavens, no! Sad at the prospect of having to leave this bed!"

"That's something to be sad about!"

"Of not having Sister Angela to say good-morning to!"

"There he goes with his blarney! The poet is incorrigible. One might think he was an Irishman!"

"No, he means it. Don't think him blasphemous, but he'd get down on his knees to her, just as she went down on her knees before the crucifix!"

"You do say such things!" But she was not angry. "If it's any comfort to you," she added, "you'll be missed, too!" And she playfully and soothingly ran her fingers through his hair.

Within a week, he was allowed to take short walks round the room and he helped Sister Angela to lift up the blankets and sheets and make up the beds, a task in which, owing to Sister Angela's company, he found a curious pleasure, as they blarneyed one another and exchanged jokes.

There were also visits from Julius, and in the course of the fortnight two or three happy letters from Winifred, to whom he wrote as ardently, without telling her of his illness. Altogether, he was as happy in the hospital as he had ever been in his life. The conflicts that had raged all his life within



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him, and outside, seemed for the time to have receded, to have become lost as in distant horizons. He dimly realised that this was a turning point, a kind of rebirth. Not that he was blind to the fact of his drifting as in a calm, and of life and its storms being yet before him, for he was almost penniless, a stranger in London, and possibly as far from his unknown goal as he had ever been. Even his love, which was waiting for him to come and claim it as his own, depended so much upon a successful issue of his adventure. Nevertheless, this interval of calm braced him, gave him new life, attuned his mind philosophically to counter new onslaughts. "I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way!" This line from an American popular song occurred to him. It was, in its way, a mystic talisman, a receding light leading him on!

The day came when he once more got into his own clothes, disinfected and cleansed like his very soul, and took leave of his fortnight's refuge and of Sister Angela, who, the eternal mother he had often dreamt of, had been such a comfort to him, never to be forgotten.

"I won't forget you. I have prayed for you. I shall pray for you!" were her words of farewell. What delicious irony, he thought, in this devout Catholic woman praying for him, who was half Jew, half Pagan! Why not? Any God would hear Sister Angela, that is, if there were a God, and if He listened to anybody!

MISERABLE PAWN, OFF THE BOARD!

It was a cold, damp afternoon when he left the hospital. A fresh breeze blew, and seemed to go to the heart of him. After a fortnight indoors, mostly in bed, he felt weaker than he had realised. It was unpleasant to face life again, on such

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a day. He could not afford a taxi, and directed his footsteps towards the nearest 'bus. As he walked slowly, he saw a familiar figure looking into the window of a bookshop. It was Alfred Welsh, his companion from Naples to Paris. He had written to Welsh only a few days before, telling him of his detention in the hospital, of his need of money on coming out. Couldn't Welsh pay the several pounds he owed him? Welsh did not reply to his letter. Welsh turned his face from the window, to be confronted with Gombarov. They exchanged greetings.

"Did you get my letter, Welsh?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you reply, then?"

"I haven't any cash to spare."

"What, nothing? You have a job!"

"Yes, but . . ."

"You mean to say, you have a job, and can't spare even a part of what you owe me? I helped you out when you needed it. Consider my position. I am a stranger in London, and am just out of the hospital. And it isn't as if I wanted to borrow money! It's a debt."

"Look here, Gombarov! I don't consider that I owe you anything. My services as interpreter in Italy were worth something! In fact, I'm not sure that you don't owe me money!"

"So that's the way you look at it! Good-by, then. And I don't want to see you again!"

Gombarov reached his miserable lodgings and, greatly fatigued, sat down to rest. He experienced a keen sense of homelessness, and for a while lost heart. He must get out of this, he thought. He must find something more cheerful. Perhaps, in Hampstead. He would write to a friend on the



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New World for a loan, which had been once offered him, but which he had refused at the time.

He was not abandoned, as he had thought. The next day he had a visit from Tom Bowles, the young painter, who, curiously enough, had been introduced to him by Welsh; indeed, the same man who had written to him some months before from Holland, telling him of that strange meeting with two of Gombarov's Philadelphia acquaintances in an Amsterdam café. Gombarov related his experience to Bowles, who detested Welsh.

"Just like that blighter!" said the visitor. "But do let me help you out. I've just sold a couple of paintings, and can advance you ten pounds, if you like!"

"Very good of you, Tom! I will try to repay you as soon as I can—not in Welsh's way, I hope!"

While Bowles was writing out a cheque, Gombarov's face broke into a smile. "Well, well!" he reflected to himself. "I had no idea that Angela's prayers would prove effective so soon. Why, I haven't seen Bowles for months, and here he turns up just as I need him!"

"I'll tell you something about Welsh that will make you laugh," said Bowles, handing him the cheque. "You remember Rugger, don't you? Well, when he got out of Rugger all that Rugger could stand, he picked up with another art student, Martin by name, and he played the old gag about sharing a studio together. Martin, poor innocent, found a studio, and Welsh installed himself there. Of, course, he didn't pay a farthing's rent, and practically lived on Martin. To cap the climax, Martin turned up one day to find Welsh in the studio with a street girl, and would you believe it, the pair were making use not of Welsh's cot, mind you,—but Martin's! Did you ever hear the like? That was too much

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even for Martin, who left the studio and all its belongings in Welsh's possession. . . ."

"The swine!" Gombarov couldn't help exclaiming.

"That isn't all!" went on Bowles. "Some weeks afterwards, Martin and a friend, happening to be dead broke, called on Welsh at the studio on the chance of finding a bite to eat. When they broached the subject, Welsh assumed a depressed look and told them that he hadn't had a decent meal in days, until their hearts were touched. So off went Martin and his friend and got hold of a bit of money. They bought food at a delicatessen shop and trotted back to the studio to share it with Welsh. Imagine their feelings when they found the blighter gorging on a huge sirloin steak—a bottle of wine, too!"

"The swine!" repeated Gombarov.

"But I haven't finished yet! Then Martin and his friend put their heads together, and took the landlady into their confidence. The landlady knew that the furniture of the studio belonged to Martin, and she wasn't any too fond of Welsh. Later in the day, while Welsh was out, they returned with a cart, and practically stripped the studio."

"I should have given a lot to have seen Welsh's face when he got back."

Gombarov felt greatly cheered by Bowles's company. He liked this simple fellow, whose nature was that of a countryman. And life wasn't altogether vile, with fellows like him around.

A MOVE TO HAMPSTEAD

By borrowing twenty pounds from his friend on the *New World* and writing a few articles Gombarov got together a small reserve fund.

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In the early spring he was settled in a large top studio room, overlooking Hampstead Heath, and here he began working in earnest on a book, which was to consist of a series of impressions of America, creative in character, with philosophic speculations as to its artistic future. He showed the opening chapter to a recent acquaintance, who was acting for a large publishing firm, and the readers of this firm were sufficiently enthusiastic for their publishing chief to send for Gombarov.

"By all means, go on with the book," said Mr. Brooke, of Brooke & Co., "and our firm would be glad to publish it. The terms we offer are not bad, considering that you are still a young man; and the publication of the book would do *you* such a lot of good! We take the risks, you see. That the readers are enthusiastic does not mean the book will sell. But we like to encourage young men of promise. In our own way, we are philanthropists, I assure you! The imprint of our firm should prove a good advertisement for you. . . ."

Gombarov left Mr. Brooke, greatly encouraged in spite of the cold water thrown on any expectation he may have had of making money out of his book. If the readers of so famous a firm as Brooke & Co. were enthusiastic, then, surely, he had no reason to feel discouraged.

For the first time in his life he sat down to his creative work regularly every morning, began to discipline himself to the hard, steady toil, without which no art or craft can be mastered. He lived frugally, prepared most of his own meals, shunned bohemianism except on occasion. He was no facile writer, and it astonished him to find what seemingly effortless effects could be obtained with very intense effort. At the end of many days' work he would feel as though he were tottering under the accumulated avalanche of words. Daily, after a morning's labours, he would fling himself face down-

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ward on the ground of Hampstead Heath and feel a renewal of strength, a new infused warmth from contact with the motherly earth. He would lie for an hour or more, tenderly, passionately clutching at the grass, breathing in the odours of the soil, filling himself with an earthly ardency, and the sap of life would run up his limbs and body and to his head, as the sap runs up a tree. Almost unwillingly he would tear himself away from the spot and go back to work, and the gathered sap would flow out of him to the paper at the point of the pen. It was hard work. "I work not so much by inspiration as by desperation," he would say to himself.

And, oh, the sheer physical weariness at the end of the day! No insatiate woman would take so much out of a man after a long debauch. There was sometimes this comfort: the result exceeded one's expectations—yet how short of one's hopes! A mother, upon seeing a more beautiful baby than her own, could not feel half the anguish an author feels in his knowledge that beauty can go farther than he has taken her, has indeed no stopping point. The simplest thoughts seem to become complex and involved; language fails one—or worse, one fails language; the frontiers between rhetoric and poetry are often unmarked and indefinable; one keeps on wondering whether one's imagination has sounded false notes; whether here one has pitched one's voice too high, or there has raised it in anger to a note too intimate. There was joy in the conception; doubtless, there would be joy also in the final giving of birth; but between these two points there was the long, painful gestation, with an occasional spark of pleasure in the dim consciousness of one's fulfillment.

Fortunately, his relations with Winifred continued to be satisfactory.

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BISHOP OFF THE BOARD!

Julius had moved into the same house as Gombarov, but they saw little of one another. Julius was busy with his own affairs, which included a daily two-hour devotion to an old invalid lady, who had engaged him to read to her. Even philosophers must live!

"I may be going to Paris!" said Julius one day, looking as solemn as a bishop.

"Where will you get the money?"

"You know the old lady, to whom I read every day? She has only a few weeks to live, and I have an idea she'll make me some sort of gift before she dies. She's wealthy, and I imagine she'll let me have at least fifty pounds."

"That's a good sum!"

"I'm hoping," said Julius, "that she'll make it seventy-five. One can do something with seventy-five!"

One June morning, some weeks following their conversation, Julius came into Gombarov's room, looking very solemn, a long envelope in his hand. He drew out its contents and, without a word, handed them to Gombarov. It was a cheque for a hundred and fifty pounds, accompanied by a note informing him of the old lady's death.

"Well, you are in clover. It's twice as much as you had hoped for!"

"I wish she had made it three hundred!" was all Julius said.

For even philosophers are only human.

A fortnight later Julius left London for good. He went to Paris.

Gombarov felt hurt. While Julius was struggling in Berlin, Gombarov had occasionally helped him with small sums of money, and he thought that Julius, remembering this and

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knowing his straitened circumstances, would come to him and say: "Look here, John, you once helped me when I was down on my luck, and now it's my turn. Well, here is a five-pound note, anyhow!" Instead, Julius merely said to him before taking his departure: "If you are short within the next few weeks, write to me, and I'll advance you anything up to five pounds!" Gombarov did not avail himself of the offer, for authors, like philosophers, are only human.

And the bishop was swept off his chessboard.

AFTER THE BISHOP—THE KNIGHT!

"Leon could never have done that!" mused Gombarov, mentally comparing his two friends.

It was only a few days after Julius's departure that Gombarov received a letter from Leon Bayliss, who had been his most intimate friend in Philadelphia. Leon was on his way to spend some weeks in Europe to see the paintings of the moderns. He intended spending a fortnight in London.

Gombarov looked forward to the arrival of his old friend, whom he regarded as a very knight of generosity and chivalry. They had been friends for ten years, and their friendship had withstood every test that would have proved fatal to ordinary loyalties. During the year's separation they kept up a regular and affectionate correspondence.

Something must have happened to both of them in the year of their separation, something incomprehensible, affecting their relationship. Both of them must have dimly felt this on the very day of Leon's arrival. Looking back on it later, Gombarov realised that there had been some constraint on both sides, and that while he had felt sad, Leon, so unlike himself, was the first to show sparks of resentment. He read to Leon a chapter or two of his book, and Leon picked flaws at the

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least opportunity. It was so unlike Leon to quibble. Only much later did it occur to him that the complexities and subtleties of modern life kill friendships as they kill love and other virtues once highly regarded. They simply entangle them in all kinds of nets. In those earlier years of their friendship, Gombarov, intimidated and crushed by his repressions, his family troubles and his continual strife with circumstance, had leaned greatly on Leon for support and encouragement. But during his year in London, in which, solitary and unaided, he had waged a struggle hardly less fierce, if more interesting, he had become, unknown to himself, of sterner metal; he had found something of his own potential soul, such as it was. Leon, apparently, was the first to note this change. His friend's moral dependence gone, Leon could not help but withhold his tenderness also. If all this became clear later, it was painful enough at the time. For his friend showed resentment, and Gombarov resented this resentment. Not a word had been said, but their resentments showed in spite of outward formalities of friendship.

Just before Leon's departure for Paris, a little scene occurred that clearly showed how things stood between them.

"Leon," said Gombarov. "You will remember that six months before my leaving for Europe I let you have a loan of fifty dollars for your parents, who were then passing through financial crisis. You promised that I should have it back in three months, and now eighteen months have gone by. I shouldn't worry you even now, were it not that things are bad with me. I am writing this book, and earning almost nothing."

Leon looked cold and resentful, but said nothing.

"Look here, Leon," went on Gombarov, persuasively. "You seem to resent my speaking of this. After all, I am not asking

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for the return of numerous sums I advanced to you as a friend, while you were struggling in London and Philadelphia. There can be no question of money between friends. But this particular sum I advanced to your parents for their business; it is a legitimate debt. And all your brothers have jobs. Consider, too, that for years I sweated to save some money to take me to Europe, and that was part of it, and I let you have it on condition that it was returned in time for use on my journey. My own folks are having a desperate time and I can send them nothing. And I am fighting for my life! Can't you see that?"

"I'll send it as soon as I can," said Leon, coldly.

Gombarov saw the futility of saying more. It was his friend's will to misunderstand. Leon's unfairness made him sad. First Julius, now Leon. It made him see that nothing is certain on this earth, that all things are possible, that one must be astonished at nothing, that one must accept everything.

"Don't be sentimental!" said Leon, when Gombarov offered to see him off on his departure for Paris.

Gombarov flushed with shame, but it was not on his own account. For he had once considered his friend the very soul of generosity and chivalry.

And his chessboard lost one of its knights.

CASTLE BROUGHT INTO PLAY

But new friends and strangers insisted on being kind. What were these but long idle castles on a chessboard, brought last into play, when the early friends, the pawns and the knights and the bishops, have failed you?

If some think this a far-fetched analogy, that a chessboard has only forty-eight pieces, whereas the author's characters, having their reactions on the "hero," the "king" of



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the chessboard, have already exceeded that number, let us draw upon the more generous and intricate chessboard of the Chinese, which can boast of no less than 256 squares, and is doubtless a brother to the famous Chinese puzzle, *Life itself!*

This was how Gombarov met Jan Maczishkek:

One day he saw an extraordinary mask on a wall in Douglass's studio. It was huge, modelled out of some substance like clay, and painted red, black and gold. It might have been the image of the god of some African tribe.

"Where did you get that?" he asked, impressed by the power and strange beauty of the mask.

"Oh, that!" said Douglass, with some condescension. "It was made by a Polish boy. He's a sculptor, and only twenty-one!"

"I'd like to meet him."

Douglass gave him Maczishkek's address. But Gombarov put off writing to him, until the matter wholly passed from his mind. One day he was astonished to hear from the sculptor, who said that he had heard of Gombarov's desire to make his acquaintance. Would he call at his studio on Thursday afternoon?

When they met at last in the doorway of Maczishkek's studio, they looked at one another with a peculiar intentness, as if they were sizing each other up, and strongly gripped hands.

"Sit down," said Maczishkek. "I won't insult you by offering you tea. We'll have some beer. You drink beer?"

"To be sure!"

Maczishkek poured out two large glasses, then sat down, stretching his feet on a colossal bearded head in Portland stone, which had some remote resemblance to royal heads in Assyrian bas-reliefs.

"What's that you have your feet on?" asked Gombarov.

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"That's my footstool—the head of Jehovah!" laughed Maczishkek.

They eyed one another with masculine sympathy. Of medium stature like Gombarov, Maczishkek had the more lithe and alert figure, and accustomed to handle great chunks of stone and marble, his arms, wrists and hands gave indications of great strength, yet were distinguished by grace. His black, straight hair, like an American Indian's, was combed back; his eyes, wide-parted, were dark and intelligently alert, and between them, curving gracefully downward, was a finely shaped, sensitive yet virile aquiline nose. An eagle!

Meanwhile his host's eyes were not idle, as became clear by his remark:

"I'd like to sculpture you. I'd call your head 'The Mountaineer.'"

"Why the Mountaineer? I've never thought of it!"

"Perhaps not. Few of us, nowadays, are doing what we were cut out to do. You may be putting all your mountaineering into your writing, just as I am putting all my primitive impulses into sculpture!"

"I should rather have thought of myself as an Arab, travelling in a caravan across the sands, from oasis to oasis!" laughed Gombarov.

"There's not so much difference. They are both nomads. And every artist is a nomad in spirit. He transmutes his desire for adventure into art. What is Homer's *Odyssey*, or Don Quixote, or the great continuous pageant of Shakespeare but life seen through the eyes of a man travelling in a caravan? Shakespeare stayed at home, so all his nomadism went into his art, and not a scrap was wasted in travelling!"

While Maczishkek was helping his visitor to more beer, Gombarov rose to look at the sculptures. He eyed a group



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of figures, reduced more or less to an abstraction of curves and planes.

"That's the 'Dancers,'" explained Maczishkek. "I had an architectural idea in mind. It's a statue that might decorate the entrance of a factory. Nothing sentimental about that, is there? Why should there be? We are living in an unsentimental age. It's a ruthless, pitiless age, and all of man's virility and ferocity goes into his machinery. I have integrated and symbolised in this statue the natural savagery of modern man as manifested in his machinery. Fauvists like Matisse are right in their reaction from civilisation towards the primitive. Cubists like Picasso are right in giving us an art that embodies the mechanics of our age. But, after all, each gives only half the truth. I am trying to give the synthesis of the two, the primitive, savage spirit incarnated in mechanics: cruelty with nuance, which distinction we see in the difference between, say, a Maori spear and the French machine-gun."

"Don't you hate it?"

"You mean the civilisation that has contrived the machine-gun? No, not exactly. I am of my time, and I accept it as a new aspect of the eternal adventure. I accept it as any artist must accept the material of his time for his art. Modern shapes have their own beauty. There are the grain elevators, gas works, railway engines, sea liners, motor cars, underground trains, giant cranes, all waiting to be adapted to a new art convention. We are creating a new language to express modern man and all the workings of his intricate brain. It's easy enough to do a thing in the Greek manner. Look at this." The sculptor produced from a shelf a small marble, a female torso. "It's one of my earlier works."

"How gracefully Greek!" exclaimed Gombarov. "But not

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Royal Academy Greek! The real thing, with all the life of the model!"

"She was alive enough!" said the sculptor. "She was willing to do more than sit for me! But I wouldn't have it. I don't like having to deal with intellectual women. They make such demands on one! They give their bodies only in exchange for what they call one's soul. I keep that for my art! If one must deal intimately with a woman, it were best if one had a Malay or a Maori girl, or one of Gauguin's Tahitian women."

"Yet you accept this machine civilisation, which has produced our neurotic women!"

"I accept it for my art, just as Dante accepted his for his art. Dante saw life as a pageant in hell. There was devilish beauty in what he saw, and there is devilish beauty in what I see. There is adventure in this!"

This young man of twenty-one talked with the mature air of one for whom earth and life held no secrets. There was nothing blasé in this. He was child-like and lively, natural and joyous, a civilised savage, in his way a god who tried to discern and establish some sort of order in the chaos about him.

"It's like this," he explained. "If you were to paint a picture of Confusion or Chaos, you'd still have to stick to some laws of composition. Chaos has its own hidden harmony, without which it cannot exist. Herakleitos, the father of modern philosophy, has said: 'Hidden harmony is better than manifest.' Once you can discover what keeps this modern chaos together, you have the secret of all life and art. For something does keep it together, doesn't it? The artist reduces it all to a single image, a single picture or piece of sculpture, just as in the 'Three Fates' in the Elgin room at



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the British Museum we have the whole soul of Greece. Picasso binds this modern chaos together by means of mechanics, Matisse by blood arteries. But it is both! Human blood runs through the steel girders made by man, and in them the soul is imprisoned."

"I am inclined to side with Matisse," said Gombarov. "I am for dæmons as against dynamos."

"You may be right!" said Maczishkek. "Yet may not the dæmons of men be twirling in these fierce dynamos? Not that I am always certain that the moderns are right, for there are moments of doubt and despair when I long to get away from it all. I sometimes long to get back to the Greeks, but one can do that only as a reaction. One's own age holds an artist in chains. Some day I may decide to go to Easter Island or some place like that, live like a native and produce tribal art."

"Do you manage to sell any of your work?"

"Only occasionally. Then I only get ten pounds or so for a statue. I earn my living chiefly by doing some commercial correspondence in the City, thanks to my knowledge of German, French and Spanish. And you?"

"I do an occasional article, or translation. Pure hack! One of these days I expect to be chucked out of my room!"

"Don't you worry about that," said Maczishkek with evident concern. "There's a cot! You can come and sleep here if you like. I live at home with my sister. Artists must help one another!"

Truly, here was a castle brought into play, a castle to the rescue!

Maczishkek was turning over drawing after drawing from a large pile on the table, while Gombarov expressed his admiration of their intense sense of life, of their simplicity and

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economy of line, which could go no farther. A single firm line seemed to bound a small universe, whether it was a bird, monkey or human being. Maczishkek held an extraordinary facility for drawing animals.

"You said you liked that one," said the artist, delighted with his visitor's unbounded admiration of the drawing of a stork. "I shall be pleased to give it to you!"

They could not have been greater friends if they had known each other ten years.

"Now, let's go to Soho and have a bite to eat!" suggested Maczishkek.

It was an extraordinary meal. They went into a delicatessen shop, where Maczishkek bought a half loaf of bread and a half pound of Gruyère cheese, after which they turned into a public house in Old Compton Street and, sitting down before a small table, ordered two mugs of beer. Maczishkek pulled out a knife and shared out the bread and the cheese. Gombarov felt as happy as a happy king. The joy of life that was in Maczishkek infected him, opened up the rich springs hidden in him under strata of accumulation.

"I say, Maczishkek, what made you come to England?"

"My father was a Pole, my mother a Frenchwoman. I was born in France; so strictly speaking, I am a Frenchman. I wasn't going to waste a couple of years in the army. And London is as good a place to work in as any. Nationality and national art are dead, and there's no reason why one shouldn't work anywhere. As I sit here talking to you, I do not feel that I am talking to a Jew, a Russian, or an American, but just to a man, or better, an artist. Art is the only Fatherland, and wherever artists meet they can talk to one another and understand one another—not at all like diplomats, who try to throw dust into each other's eyes!"



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"Come to think of it," said Gombarov, "it is astonishing to find London so full of foreign artists. It was not so long ago that all English art was produced by Englishmen. It is odd, too, that here am I, born in a little Ukrainian village and naturalised an American, talking to you, Franco-Pole, here in London!"

"Do you realise the full significance of that?"

"Of the trifling fact that we are talking here together?"

"Yes. But it's not such a trifling fact as would seem on the surface. England is ancient Rome all over again. The arts of Rome in her decadence were to a great extent produced by foreigners. Don't you see, it's like this. When a body is young and lusty it is egotistic. When it is old and about to fall apart, it has less resistance and admits all sorts of alien microbes. And an Empire is very much like a human body. It is a condition that applies to the whole Western world, in particular to France, Germany and England. Morally, the British Empire takes in all that world upon which it has forced machinery and industrialism: in these lie the significance of modern Anglo-Saxon civilisation. All these countries compose, in a sense, one machine, one Empire. If one part breaks, the whole machine goes out of order. So we have no wars; nevertheless, these countries may be just decaying, dying of old age, wearing out just as human limbs or parts of machines wear out. We, modern artists, are the first to see this, and so we may be performing a useful function in injecting new life into old bodies! We may be the barbarians, the saviours of decaying humanity!"

This audacious thinking amazed Gombarov, who began to consider Maczishkek the most valuable of his acquaintances. What a curious combination of simplicity and complexity!

But Maczishkek was more than an acquaintance. He was

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a friend, whose generosity to Gombarov did not stop with his offer of a cot in his studio. A fortnight after their first meeting Maczishkek called at Gombarov's and unwrapped a heavy parcel he had brought with him. He drew out a small marble, a standing boy stretching himself.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"Magnificent!" said Gombarov, with enthusiasm.

"Well, you can have it!"

"What, you give me the statue? I love it, but how can I deprive you of your bread and butter?"

"Never mind! I want you to have it, because I like you!"

What could one say after that? It was a great honour to be liked by Maczishkek.

"By the way," said Gombarov, "I've been talking about you to various people. Tobias Bagg wants to meet you. He knows a lot of people who could be useful to you!"

"I don't want to meet that man," said Maczishkek. "I was at the exhibition the other day where I have a couple of statues. I happened to be standing just by them, when a man and a lady stopped in front of them. He pronounced my name contemptuously, with a kind of sneeze. I walked up to him, and said: 'Sir, that name is pronounced Jan Maczishkek! I know the correct pronunciation because it happens to belong to me!' And I walked away. Someone at the gallery told me it was Tobias Bagg."

A fortnight later Gombarov approached him again, with the news that Bagg wanted to buy the two statues at the exhibition. "He is an artist himself," said Gombarov, "and he can't pay much, but if the terms are within his purse he will buy them."

"Will he give fifteen pounds for the two?"

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"I am sure he will!"

Maczishek was hard up. And he was neither sufficiently well-known nor sufficiently dead to command large prices.

And so Bagg had the pleasure of meeting Maczishek.

AN AUDACIOUS MOVE

And Gombarov's Queen was still there, not at the King's side, it is true, but at the other end of the board. What piece has fewer liberties than a King? Our Western chess-board is a constitutional monarchy; it is possible that even the chess-board has been influenced by political considerations; the ancient chess-board may have been a wholly different thing. But whether in autocratic days the chess King had powers denied him today, the Queen has remained the flighty, reckless creature she is, and if she be indiscreet she may be bowled over by a bishop, knight or pawn, the latter hardly more than a mere page! And now, imagine, if you can, a King in revolt against all rules of kingdom, flying to his Queen, the better to keep his eye on her, across a whole diagonal of squares! Woe to the King who rebels!

The new year was approaching; by sticking at it Gombarov had nearly finished his book. He turned his thoughts to crossing the Atlantic to see Winifred. The thought buoyed him up, helped him to persist on the final chapters. A feverish energy sometimes kept him at work both day and night. From the other side of the sea Winifred was clamouring for a sight of him. Passionate letters came two or three times a week, begging, imploring and entreating him to come and see her:

"If only for one wee little week, one day, one hour, or even five little seconds!"

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"I think I cannot wait much longer—oh, come soon, my dear, my dear!"

"All this time without you is terrible—it has been the most barren year of my life!"

"If you come you will not be sorry—I am living for this alone—I simply must see you!"

"If you come, I am yours, to do with as you please!"

"Even the terrible, hellish New York would seem like heaven, if you would only come!"

"And so you say you are coming, actually coming. What boat, my own dear, when, when, *when?*"

A fine lover was he not to respond at once to such tender appeals! It was true that Winifred and her mother were planning to come to Europe again six months hence, but that was a long time to wait, and what with her appeals and his own hunger for a sight of her, he was seized with an all-consuming desire to do the reckless, audacious thing, to go to her at all costs!

Apart from her appeals and his own desire, he was moved to this decision by a wild, irresistible impulse to do the reckless, audacious thing for its own sake. He deemed himself over-cautious, and his hard, repressed life—so it seemed to him—had paralyzed his will to act on impulse. He must break the spell that held him, must act just to prove to himself that he could act. Yet could he forget the barriers to action, the simple lack of money? Why, he had hardly even enough to take him there, to say nothing of the money he would require to stay there a fortnight or a month, and to bring him back. Fine lover, indeed, to think of such trifles! But there would be no audacity in his decision if he were blessed with a fat purse. A multi-millionaire wouldn't think twice of it! In short, the whole thing seemed impossible,



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but he wanted to do the impossible because it was the impossible; if not exactly impossible, then simply foolish. Many a foolish man has won the Victoria Cross, and from the worldly point of view Don Quixote was something of a fool. His love for her was great, and he felt the need of making a heroic gesture to prove its greatness. He wanted to do something sublimely ridiculous. Considering his position, the action he was contemplating was beautifully foolish. But what a lover's gesture! Three thousand miles just to see a girl—then three thousand miles back—not bad for a mere beggar! Surely, after that gesture, his Dulcinea could never again assume the garb of Aldonza! Never would Winifred again forsake him! Could she even think of it?

From his friends Gombarov got together a sufficient sum to take him third-class to New York and to keep him frugally there for a month or so. The thought of holding Winifred in his arms again keyed him up to an intense and feverish expectancy. He bought his ticket a fortnight before sailing, and spent the final week in packing his belongings, which he intended depositing with friends. Who knew?—he might be under compulsion to remain in New York, and cheap as the room was, he could not afford to keep it.

REAL KING, OR *ALTER EGO*

Gombarov made a discovery. As long as he had worked by day expressing himself on paper, he slept untroubled; but once he stopped working, he was visited by dreams.

In that final fortnight, after finishing his book, he had several dreams, and one dream in particular, which was not so much a dream as an extraordinary symbolic vision, seen at night in a state of wakefulness. For three nights preceding it, he saw heads of children, chubby faces lit up in the dark by a

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mysterious light: the faces of children peered at him from the darkness, and nothing else of them was visible. On the fourth night he awoke, his face turned up toward the ceiling. He felt strangely, keenly awake, his mind intensely clear, super-consciously clear. He lay on his back and did not move. The large, undraped, unshuttered window at his back let in the first faint light of winter dawn. Without turning his head, he let his eyes stray toward the distant door of the large, high room, which was shut and locked. He saw a strange thing before the door: a tall male figure, at least eight feet in height, dressed in black. Gombarov, wide awake, experienced no fear, only curiosity. His mind analysed the apparition. He said to himself:

"That must be an illusion. Probably I see it because a certain part of my brain is in contact with creases in the pillow, and if I move ever so little the figure is sure to disappear. But I must not move. I do not want it to disappear. I want to see what will happen."

The tall figure seemed to linger near the door for a few moments, then moved forward, toward Gombarov. It was some feet away, and was slowly coming forward. Gombarov, lying quietly, now observed that over its shoulders it wore a voluminous black cloak, and that its large masculine head, somewhat bowed, had longish thick straight hair. Though he could not see the face, there was a hint of a frown in it, a suggestion of meditation.

"How like Hamlet!" said Gombarov to himself.

And still nearer the colossal figure approached. It was now at the foot of the bed. It suddenly turned up its bowed head; a light fell on its face. Gombarov was astonished. It was himself! Only a taller, an altogether finer, handsomer self! The face looked down on him and frowned. Its eyes

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appeared to regard him critically. Gombarov suddenly understood. A thought—a phrase of Emerson's—that he remembered, shot through his brain:

"Man is but dwarf of himself!"

"Rise to your full height, Gombarov!" was what the thought conveyed to him.

Then, at the very instant that Gombarov understood, his *Alter Ego* relaxed its frown, seemed to understand that he had understood, and began to retreat, backing, still facing him; and when the apparition had thus reached the door, it vanished, its black hair seeming to lose itself within Gombarov's broad-brimmed hat hanging on the door.

Gombarov lay wide awake, overcome with wonder at what he had seen. There was ecstasy in this wonder. What mysterious powers had sent him this revelation of his potential self, seen with a clear brain and wakeful eyes? How was he to free his cramped, hunch-backed soul, cause it to rise to his vision's height? But he knew even then that it was to be to him as a pillar of light in the darkness of future days, ever receding, ever urging him on.

And thus he lay thinking, until daylight began to flood the room.



BOOK III
BRAIN-STORM



CHAPTER X: BRAIN-STORM

*" . . . it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound
and fury,
Signifying nothing."*
—MACBETH.

QUEST OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE

THE huge Cunarder clove a path through the ponderous waters, and hope advanced above the vast deeps of life. Here seemed to be enough water to render everything else insignificant, impotent; enough water to create as immense a despair in the heart of insignificant man; enough water to drown an army of men and all their despair, their hope also, leaving not so much as a ripple to indicate their one-time existence and all the aspirations and illusions of that existence. Yet, steadily and speedily and buoyantly, the steel-riveted, smoke-spouting monster, larger than any leviathan, with erect prow, as with sharp knife, cut through and ploughed up the hillocks of boundless, motionful meadow, and left behind a long, straight line of white foam and, overhead, a trail of black breath. The spray shot up the sides of the ship at a sharp angle and struck the deck in a curve of thin mist. The day was grey, the sea tinged green. The ship faced the wind; nevertheless, Gombarov stood near the prow, eyes fixed on the west. There he was nearer, a full seven hundred feet nearer than at the stern, to the object of his quest.

The ship was, indeed, over seven hundred feet long, or about a seventh of a mile, and had four funnels; its passengers must



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have felt a certain pride when they saw passing ships having only one or two funnels. It was, in its way, a complete world, and within this seventh of a mile, which to distant ships must have seemed no more than a speck, the whole social order of our civilisation, was reconstituted in a form at once concentrated and intense. There, below, deep in the hold, were the half naked, begrimed, sweaty stokers, feeding the insatiate, flame-tongued furnaces; Gombarov had seen a stoker carried on deck, overcome by their hot breath. A little higher, also in the hold, were the poorest steerage passengers, of the immigrant class. These shared the fair sized deck of the fairly respectable if indigent third-class passengers. Gates barred the way to the second-class upper deck, which belonged, for the most part, to the well-to-do middle classes. Gates barred the second-class passengers from intruding on those of the first-class, who promenaded the highest, finest deck of all. There, lording it over all, were the world's successful men and women. Captains of Industry and their wives and young heiresses, ladies of quality, opera singers and actresses and first-class courtesans, with excellent purses all. More rarely was a first-class Captain of Art to be found in this company. Indeed, the Irish poet, Raftery, was on board. Gombarov had seen him ascending the gang-board at Liverpool, but could not communicate with him. Nowhere more than in a ship is society rigidly divided into the haves and the have-nots. Therefore, Gombarov had no love of ocean-liners. Of an evening, gaiety reigned on the upper decks; sounds of instrumental music and of music from operatic throats strayed below; one felt conscious of the proximity of desired, well-dressed women dancing in intimate contact with their partners; it was annoying and sad to be shut off from all this. It was not that he wanted them, this gaiety and desirable

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women; but he wanted the key to all this that he might throw it away. There was no virtue in keeping away from things because you had to.

The third-class accommodation was far from crowded. There was room for six times the number. Gombarov had a small cabin all to himself. He liked the simple souls on board who had embarked with the hope of finding a home in a new land. He was attracted to the family groups, with their sturdy peasant types, often in native dress (which they would soon be deprived of), huddled together in the evening on deck, laughing and chattering to hide their hope and concern, the younger members tripping to a folk tune, suddenly struck up by a fiddle and accordion. It was amusing to watch the girls being deftly swung round like tops, their skirts blowing out like bells, their lusty outcries harmoniously mingling with the hand-clapping and foot-stamping of young men, lost and merged at last in the applause of the dense circle of onlookers. It was old-world gaiety, and sadly Gombarov reflected that all this would be swallowed up and lost in new world ways. And American tunes, rag and incipient jazz, were beginning to pervade and conquer Europe.

The huge liner continued to cleave her way through the ponderous waters, and hope to advance above the vast deeps of life. What better symbol of hope was there than a ship steadfastly moving across that vast expanse of uncertain, murderous waters? What better symbol of the immensity of human solitude and despair than that same sea, endless and boundless, full of mysterious, invisible life, eternally surging, eternally, restlessly moving, mirroring quiet blue skies, or tossing with quenchless fury? What but a habitation of hope, a world, a universe of human aspiration, a battle and a challenge to that immense despair, to the treacherous sea, to



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death itself, was Noah's Ark, floating, drifting above the deluge, seeking quiet, a refuge from that despair, an isle of contentment? What was the Argo, Jason's quest of the Golden Fleece, but the human seeking of happiness, in the same sea of eternal despair—had Jason found it? Yes, but—there was a string to it, and at the end of the string Medea!

Then *Santa Maria*, Christopher Columbus's Ark or Argo, a ship of hope, if ever there was one, and that hope all centred in the heart of one man, fighting the storms of sea and the mutinies of incredulous men, overcoming both. Nor was there a sea of disparity between the historic Italian and the fictitious but none the less real Nantucketer, Captain Ahab, of the ship *Pequod*, seeking the elusive Moby Dick, the White Whale, which, like a white light, lured him on, him and his crew, and wrecked him, once he had caught up with his hope, his white light. Woe to him, then, who overtakes his hope, catches up with the White Whale, the White Light, or the White Girl, the eternal aspiration of one's heart! Yet who is immune from the emotion that awakens in the human heart at the time-old cry of "Land! Land! Land!" What, if like Columbus, we sail to find the East Indies, and after a woful journey, inadvertently discover the Indies of the West?

Gombarov, facing the wind, stood near the ship's prow and continued to look westward through the deepening twilight. The sky was overcast, but there was a strip of clear white light on the horizon, between the black sea line and the black cloud, and into this curtain of black cloud mystic shafts of light penetrated divergently upward like the spokes of a fan, and were interlaced with it in varying degrees of intensity, like white ribbons running through the slits of a diaphanous grey-black material of an intense softness. That white strip of light was of enticing loveliness, translucent and radiant,

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and, the cloud descending on either side, it slowly assumed the rounded shape of a woman's white shoulders, peeping from under a grey-purple coverlet, the heaving sea. And this light shone, leading him on.

And suddenly, directly ahead in the distance, a four-masted schooner emerged from the shadows of the cloud, and hove in sight, in full sail, crossing the line of that strip of light, a beautiful winged silhouette as of some dark phantom ship, depending for flight on its own wings and God's wind. Like a bird on the crest of a wave, it rocked gently, dipping now its head, now its tail, in the radiance of the dying light.

Wingless, the liner advanced speedily and unswervingly, a symbol of a new conquering world. What a contrast was here! Wings were needless, winds also. No favours from God! Man had installed an iron stomach in the ship, and he fed that stomach with fuel, and the ship flew along on its belly, like the wingless serpent of the Garden of Eden which had defied God. Finite and dispossessed, man had, nevertheless, made use of his having tasted of the fruit of the tree of knowledge to become a god unto himself! The soul of man was in the belly of that monster ship, pushing it on, other ships also, to goals innumerable. The ship's wings were in its stomach. Somewhere a thousand men were digging into the deep insides of the earth for food wherewith to feed this insatiate stomach. Her four funnels were belching forth excrement into the pure air, challenging heaven.

An army marched on its stomach, said Napoleon; a ship, too, nowadays, glided swiftly on its belly. And love?—how was love to reach its goal? He would have that to think of when he reached New York. Eager and impatient as he was, he knew that certain practical problems would have to be faced, could not long be deferred.



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That morning, he reflected, a Swede, young and robust, six feet two in height, had hanged himself in his cabin, while breakfast was being served. Yet he, too, must have hoped; otherwise he would not have booked passage on the ship. It was possible, of course, that he had been running to not so much as from a place. He might have hanged himself on land, without paying a fare. Poor man! Not that whole immense ship could save the hope he had had and lost. His White Whale, White Light or White Girl he must have left behind!

But the thought of seeing Winifred again banished every other thought, and Gombarov gave himself up to it as he watched the white light on the horizon narrowing and narrowing, until it disappeared and there was but a wall of darkness in front of him. He felt cold, and he walked along the deck until he found a sheltered corner. Here his huddled figure rested, while inside of him a white light burned, and in this light was the face he loved.

END OF THE QUEST

The ship slowly crept up to New York's broad waterway, in the winter twilight, past innumerable tall towers, generously besprinkled with light, glimmering in the evening mist. It was as if man had said: "No favours from God! I'll have a Milky Way of my own!" And he poured out this bounty of glimmers from his electro-mechanical cornucopia. There was this immense glimmering wall stretching along the banks of the stream, where not so long ago the Red Indian glided swiftly in his canoe, while his squaw on shore attended to the papoose. God's stars were obscured, man's stars shone brilliantly. It was as if man had unscrewed the firmament above, pressed it flat, and stood it up on end. There was writing on this wall, too—letters of light. Man was taking no chances. If

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there was to be handwriting on his wall, he'd not wait for God's hand to put it there, especially as his fellows were willing to take the space—at so much per square inch! Gombarov read some of the signs:

"Lokum's Balsam is Best for Corns!"

"Curvo Corsets Preserve the Shape!"

"Drink Bolo-Moko! You Won't Like It At First!"

"Jupp's Whiskey Makes the World Go Round!"

Later, when he passed a Salvation Army place and read the electric sign over the door: "Come in, and get nearer to God!" he realised that God had an equal chance with anyone else, provided His representatives paid for the space, which was only fair.

For the time being, standing on deck there, he was not so near as to note all the details of this extraordinary illumination; but there was the beauty of this immense jagged wall and its towers, which in that twilight mist were as the battlements of some fabulous castle, erected and inhabited, surely, by a race of mythical giants. The wonder of it was greater when he reflected that these towers had been planned and built by a race relatively Lilliputian, "by men no larger than I!"

"There is a tower in the soul of man," he mused, "and this tower often becomes a reality, whether it be in the form of a pagoda, a pyramid, a skyscraper, that beautiful bridge we've just passed, or a play by Shakespeare. That tower topples in the end, surely; always to be rebuilt in a new form. What was the original Babel?" he suddenly asked himself. "Not a tower, literally, but a condition, a state of mind, a state of civilisation . . . perhaps, a finished civilisation, an Empire, ready to topple . . . like a child's house of blocks, when it's finished, and the child is weary of it. All things and all



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aspirations seem to come to this toppling point, to perish when our brain has become filled with human knowledge and we have become old men and realised the folly of being gods without eternity. Time alone is the best judge . . . so having no eternity, we make our instants eternal. Just as at this instant, I appear to be living for one thing, to see Winifred. . . .”

And at the thought of her name, everything else became obliterated, his other thoughts as well as these immense towers, and he burned with the ecstasy of his hope, with the sense of the nearness of the object of his quest.

“Third-class citizens only!” shouted a uniformed official, walking along the deck.

American citizens were to be allowed to land at once. The immigrants would be kept over night, to be subjected next day to a severe scrutiny from officials on Ellis Island. They were in a state of suppressed excitement. They were so near the goal of their hopes, yet tomorrow—who knew? The rejected ones would have to travel the whole distance back, some of them four thousand miles or more. Hard luck! An increased knowledge of the earth did not make for an increased earth and an increase in the fruits thereof. They were seeking but food and opportunity. The earth was overcrowded. A secret terror was in the hearts of these men and women as they waited for the morrow. Suppose even one of a large family were rejected, what were they to do? To enter the United States, a country of three million square miles, you had to walk through a series of narrow stiles, just wide enough to allow a single man, woman or child to pass at a time. They looked enviously to the small group that responded to the cry:

“Third-class citizens only!”

But the third-class citizens growled:

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"We may be third-class passengers, but we are not third-class citizens!"

All because the official had left a comma out! But the immigrants would have been only too glad to be admitted as "third-class citizens."

Gombarov, lugging his leather bag, the same he had carried from Victoria Station to Russell Square, was soon travelling in a trolley towards Washington Square, where the Gwynnes had a studio apartment.

He found their names on the door among other names, and in answer to his ring of their bell, the door gave a slight click and opened as of itself. He ascended one flight of stairs, and once on the landing, heard a familiar, timid voice from above:

"Is that you, John?"

Another moment, and they were in each other's arms.

"Is it really you?" she said.

"Pinch me, and see!"

"I had better pinch myself to see that I'm alive and awake. I can't believe it. How I have wanted you!"

She hid her head in his coat and was shy, as if she had not known a man's kisses before.

"I'll never let you out of my sight again!" she whispered.

Gombarov was happy.

Her mother emerged from the next room, effusive in greeting, and he felt as if he had come home after long wandering. It was a delicious feeling for one who had had a wretched childhood and youth. The three of them talked, then went out to dinner together, Winifred's hand in her lover's.

It was strange to be in New York after London. London sprawled, New York stood up. London rumbled, New York screeched. London had a purring softness, a roundness of feature under a veil; New York's aural radiance was clear

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and hard, and in it her features were seen to be hard and angular and decisive, like a Red Indian's. No windings of streets to lure a stranger round a curve. Skies were abolished. One walked in rectilinear ravines between erect perpendicular cliffs which resembled real cliffs only in the degree that pyramids resemble mountains. It was not to be denied that there was a fierce, austere beauty here, cruel if you like, but cruel only as youth is cruel.

Walking arm in arm, they turned a sharp corner and were in Broadway, the Great White Way, the Milky Way of a man-created universe. Lights, lights, lights! Twinkling, glimmering, dancing, antic-performing lights. An animated jovial figure, constructed out of lights, pouring himself a glass of Jupp's Whiskey and saying, "Gee, it's good!" grinning out of his electric eyes. A lithe electric cat jumping on to a sewing machine and getting entangled in a mass of thread, only to jump down again in a desperate effort to extricate itself. Impossible! The thread was too strong. "Buy no other!" An electric young lady, in her electric boudoir, in déshabille, brushing her electric teeth with an electric toothbrush, dipped in Delictum Tooth Paste, which "Assures a Sweet Breath!" An electric ballet girl gyrating on her electric legs, proclaiming Manhattan Foxtrot Hall to be "the place to dance in." Myriads of lights, twinkling, glimmering, revolving, quivering, performing "stunts" in plenty. Vulgar some of them, yet very wonderful.

"Perfectly diabolic, don't you think?" asked Winifred.

He laughed and answered enigmatically:

"What would be the glory of God without Satan?"

"But Satan has it all his own way here, let me assure you. If you had been here as long as we, you'd think so too!"

"I don't deny it. Only sometimes it is hard to tell one

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from the other. There is so much bad in what is called good, and so much good in what is called bad."

"Mother, he hasn't changed at all. He is the same old philosopher!" Winifred added: "But I don't want him to change."

"I've changed more than you know," he replied. "But I haven't changed with regard to you."

She tenderly pressed his arm.

Seated in an Italian restaurant, they exchanged experiences, talked over the things that had happened since their last meeting.

They decided to surprise the Roneys in their flat, five minutes' distance by the subway. Roney, a good fellow, was one of Gombarov's oldest friends. He had been a student at the Art School, and in his work his leanings were half towards Phil May, half towards Forain. At the time they knew each other in Philadelphia, the conservative editors catering for a conservative public considered his drawings outrageously revolutionary. Gombarov had fought with the editors of the *New World* to get Roney's drawings in, and now the same Roney was a great success and three big New York dailies had contested for his services as cartoonist. The world did move!

The Roneys were, indeed, surprised to see Gombarov, of whose coming they had no inkling, and Roney at once suggested taking them all to a late supper and cocktails in the combined dance and dining hall of a famous hotel. The five of them crowded into a taxi, and Roney directed the driver to drive first to a certain point in Broadway just beyond Forty-second Street.

"Look!" said Roney, pointing upward, as the taxi stopped.

Gombarov looked out of the taxi window, and read the

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large sprawling electric letters: "See Roney's Cartoon in Today's Chronicler!"

"Well, you are getting on, Roney! What do you draw now?"

"A hundred and fifty simoleons per week. But New York takes it all."

Gombarov felt insignificant, and not a little alarmed. His entire borrowed fortune did not amount to a hundred dollars. How was he to exist, give Winifred a good time, go to Philadelphia to see his family, and get back to London? The lightness of his purse weighed him down. But he thought: he had made a great sacrifice in coming, and Winifred must love him for it!

JAZZ DRINKS, JAZZ MUSIC, JAZZ DANCING!

He revived from his temporary depression under the influence of cocktails, the music of the jazz band and the sight of fox-trotting couples.

He marvelled at the antics of the band. There, on a small platform, were three negroes, in dazzlingly white shirts and white collars, making enough noise for ten. What extraordinary instruments! An out-of-tune piano, a banjo and a drum and numerous subsidiary instruments, such as a triangle, a hanging bottle, a rattle, a battered sauce-pan, a string of bells, a cymbal, a flute so arranged over the drum that the drummer could put his mouth on it without ceasing to function with his hands; and two or three other strange instruments newly invented; and the collection was manipulated by this active black trio, who often reinforced the instrumental noises with their own voices, while their black faces, their big-lipped red mouths arranged into quarter-moons, grinned. What was more extraordinary, the players managed to extricate a tune,

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even a distinct tune, from this multiplicity of cacophonous instruments, out of this chaos of rasping, jangling noises; indeed, they played the hidden melody of primordial chaos, a melody clear enough for dancers to dance to it.

That was strange: the spectacle of civilised society, well-groomed men and exquisite, refined-ankled, delicately turned women, responding to the most primitive essences in the arts: tribal music and steps and movements richly symbolic of sex. Life, nature itself, long repressed, was breaking through the puritan shell, and there was no puritan law that could prevent it. Books were censored: there was no censoring music! And odd it was, that the Congo should be conquering America, and that in her turn, America should be conquering Europe. This new music would soon be heard from San Francisco to Moscow.

He looked on wistfully, for he could not dance, as he saw his Winifred borne across the floor in the embrace of Roney, their tall slender bodies and their legs moving sensually and rhythmically against each other's, with an intimacy like that of barbaric lovers. At the neighbouring table he saw a pretty girl sitting alone, her thin, frail garments outlining her flowing form, and wistfully he looked at her with the eyes of one who wished to dance, but could not. He wanted to feel her limbs moving against his as Winifred's were against Roney's, and with the second cocktail, the jazz among drinks, his desire grew. Roney soon returned, and Winifred was claimed by a stranger: her hair brushed the stranger's face, her bosom lay against the stranger's, and her limbs pressed and moved against the stranger's. She appeared to be enjoying herself: Gombarov felt sad. She returned, pressed his hand, his spirits revived.

It was not until after one o'clock that they returned to

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the apartment. Mrs. Gwynne went into the kitchen to prepare tea, while the lovers exchanged tenderesses. In his happiness he forgot everything.

The Gwynnes had no accommodation for him, and so about two o'clock, taking a few articles with him, he set out to find a hotel. The night was cold, and he took the first place he could find. He felt that the charge of one dollar and a half was more than he could afford. Tomorrow he would look for cheaper lodgings.

"After all," he reflected, as he curled up under the sheets, "it has been a miracle, in my circumstances, to have come at all this three thousand miles. Audacity should bring luck! Oh, God, help me! And make Winifred keep on loving me!"

He prayed like a credulous child to suppress his fears, and tired after his big day was soon asleep.

He had breakfast with the Gwynnes. It was not until the fourth day that he found a suitable lodging in Greenwich Village in a house that sheltered artists and students. He secured a small room, which was equipped with neither a grate nor a radiator. It was only fit for sleeping in. As it was, he spent the rest of his time with Winifred or in seeing editors. He wanted to do a weekly art and literary letter from London. His London address on his visiting card admitted him to the editors of newspapers and periodicals. They were all polite and willing to consider articles sent in the usual manner, but did not want to bind themselves to any regular feature. He was not a facile writer, and this did not appeal to him. He wanted to be forced to turn out an article by a given date; otherwise his interest might flag. He succeeded in interesting the editor of Roney's paper, to whom at lunch he proposed writing a weekly letter dealing with the newer aspects of art and literature. The idea appealed to the editor,

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who, on consulting, however, the editor of the Art and Literature Section, found him hotly opposed to "advertising madmen and notoriety seekers." He was an old man, well known in the art world as a deep-dyed puritan and conservative.

Gombarov spent many days in the futile quest of editors. The weather was intensely cold, and if he stopped in some light lunch place for a coffee and to get rest and warmth, the waiters and proprietor would look askance at him if he continued sitting too long. He was occupying valuable space. Their place was kept to sell food and drink and not to have loafers hanging about. It was not as in England or on the Continent, where if you paid for a coffee you took a lease on a chair for as long as you liked. And he would resume his idle quest of editors. It was discouraging. There was something in the phrase of an American writer: "A job is, but Art ain't!" Surely. There was the inevitable reaction in the evening, when he called on Winifred, without a crumb of good news, and tacitly looked for consoling caresses.

The first week passed happily, even ecstatically. While on the steamer he had made the resolution that if, by a tenacious effort, he could secure something tangible in the nature of a regular correspondence from London, he would ask her to marry him there and then. The three of them could always manage to keep the wolf from the door, while he worked to improve his condition. What was the good of waiting until you grew too old to enjoy the best of life and love? He could better concentrate on his work if he did not have this hanging uncertainty of Winifred to trouble him; this uncertainty would continue as long as their love should remain unconsummated. This consummation alone could free him, release his energies for the coping with the network of problems which beset the modern Occidental man. He needed, first



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of all, this fulfillment of himself in a woman, to make his fulfillment in other things possible, and life worth while. He wished she could see this. He had thought on the steamer that his own audacious move would provoke her into making a counter move; that of her own will and impulse she would suggest such a course, the only course, even if he should fail to secure an immediate profitable living. Was not love love, knowing neither shame nor barriers? He had need of such encouragement, even if he failed to take advantage of it: he simply could not understand a love which failed in misfortune, which did not offer all unconditionally. Love was a full measure, or it was nothing!

After a long day's trudging of the cold, wet streets and of interviewing useless editors, he would call in the evening ready to cheer up at the sight of her, only to find her depressed. He was sensitively aware that if he could have but come in, bringing news of luck, the whole complexion of things would have changed, but inwardly, deep within him, he was disconcerted at his discovery. Poor is the love that waits upon luck! He waited for but a single cheering, consoling word. It would have filled him with new courage. But she would not say it. Perhaps she could not. Still, she might try. He had come three thousand miles for her, because she clamoured for him. She might try to remember that.

Of course, there were also cheerful evenings. He could not afford to ask her to the theatre. But they called on friends, and friends called on them.

NEW LAMPS FOR OLD!

One evening they visited Mrs. Van Dingen's salon, where they amusedly watched poor artists greedily helping themselves to legs of chicken, which they held up with their fingers and

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gnawed from the bone, as, standing in small groups, they discussed "patterns," "life-urges" and "dynamics" between mouthfuls. It was the same as in London, except that the food here was better and the manners worse. Goodness knew, the poor devils needed the food, especially as the opportunity to receive it gratis came but once a week.

Gombarov was introduced to the hostess, a large amiable woman, who wrote a kind of jazz poetry, full of thumping nouns and no verbs. "I am so fond of the Russians!" she said—he had heard that from a London hostess before—and straightway passed on to speak to an Irishman. "Why do I feel out of place everywhere, a perfect Ishmael, and especially here, in New York?" Gombarov asked himself. Every nationality and race was represented here, and English was spoken in a variety of exotic accents and intonations. The feature of the evening was the reading of a poem by a female disciple of an American woman poet residing in Budapest. The poem was called "Fanciful Frying-pans," and ran as follows:

*Crumbs screwed on narrow shoulders,
Crumbs full of maggots,
Crumbs falling apart,
Ripe Camembert is a brother,
Lid off, no hat, a pleasant surprise, life teems.
Medlar apples too case in point
Sponge absorbing life, sponge squeezed out,
Joy of ooze, joy of squeeze, joy of doubt
Suggesting universes
In fulfillment.
Crumbs crumble,
Narrow shoulders fall in,
Life goes on.
Maggots, fierce, eternal,
At end of tether
Infect the dead.*



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*A sponge increasing,
Trousers filled out,
A balloon in the mist,
An unhappy life-preserver,
A thing throttling,
Better off—
Better on if you can save it . . .
A slant, a zig-zag, a spiral.
A plunge through space,
A pin-point seeking salvation,
A joy swimming,
A minnow, a whale,
Any minnow, any whale,
A reverberating laughter,
The cry of a woman in labour
Searching for an island. . . .*

And so on, and so on. It took a full fifteen minutes to read the whole poem. At the end there was applause. Someone behind Gombarov leaned over his shoulder and asked him:

"What do you think of it?"

Gombarov recognised him as a young painter he had met a few days before. He replied:

"I hardly know what to say. She seems to hint at disintegration of society."

"There's something in it," said the painter. "It is an Expressionist poem. She is trying to do in words what we painters are doing in paint, to eliminate perspective, false sentiment and trivialities. Some think she is too conservative, leans too much to the right. Anyhow, she is doing something to destroy old forms and create new ones, which is all to the good!"

After that the company rose, and there was more gnawing of chicken bones. Gombarov talked with the poetess and found her extremely sane in conversation. Indeed, he found

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all modern artists quite reasonable in their theories, which they usually expressed with great clarity. It was only their practice that he sometimes failed to grasp.

They left at one o'clock. It was bitterly cold, so that he felt as if he hadn't a stitch of clothing on him, and Winifred swore because they could not afford a taxi.

Back in his lodgings, he felt cold, wretched and alone. The evening at Mrs. Van Dingen's left an ineffable impression of chaos and dissolution. Such was the effect these groups of ultra-moderns nearly always exercised on him. Yet he had made such an effort to be modern, even ultra-modern.

"I wonder," he asked himself, not for the first time, "whether I am old-fashioned? But that cannot be, for I detest the old and the old-fashioned as much as they! They would ridicule my love affair if they knew of it! What, then, is wrong with me that I can find a place neither with the old nor the new?" One thing was certain: the impulse of revolt was working in them all against the world and its decadent institutions, against the whole meaninglessness of life. Yet was not this revolt, this intense desire to return to the primitive, in itself an indication of the decadence of the world? If that was true of the artists, always the pulse-feelers of any age, was it not also true that a phenomenon such as modern music and dancing exhibited a similar temper among the people?

RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE

Next evening Gombarov arrived at the Gwynnes' in a cheerful mood. He had disposed of three chapters from his book for serial publication to a very "high-brow" magazine, which, unfortunately, like all periodicals of that class, did not pay well. Still, it looked like a turn of luck, and he felt pleased with himself. Winifred, however, showed only a slight degree



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of pleasure. She belonged to a more realistic world. Why, thirty dollars, the sum he would receive for those articles, would keep the wolf from a New York door for just one week, provided there were only one person behind that door. If she were only a little more encouraging!

Even during that second week there were passionate intervals, when she clung to him tenderly and craved a mutual nakedness and fulfillment. He wanted her, yet had had enough of snatching at life. He did not want to take what was his own like a sneak-thief during her mother's brief absences. He wanted the peace of a blue chamber, inviolate against intrusion, the leisured delights of a king in his palace, be that palace no more than a room several feet square. He was afraid to hazard the future by ineffectual snatching, for she was a virgin, and he knew what she did not know, that a virgin was not to be taken as in novels, even in first-class novels: that is, if the stories he had heard from husbands were to be believed. In these passionate moments, when she clung to him and they mutually craved one another, he felt like one utterly lost. There they were, those two beings in him, accursedly antithetic: the impulsive barbarian and the responsible, calculating, civilised man, and the latter was the stronger. Surely, he was between the devil and the sea. He was aware of his losing in her eyes, yet should he hazard the future for the instant? Once when, in passion, he was kissing her, she turned to him and asked:

"Have you ever been with a woman?"

He was silent.

She went on: "You know what I mean!"

He had been preparing for the question, yet it took him by surprise. On the steamer he had resolved to tell her everything should the occasion arise. He wanted to keep nothing

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from her. He argued that she would forgive him everything after the many trials of his love, his persistent devotion, and his final sacrifice.

"Yes," he replied.

"Where?" She sat up suddenly and looked at him.

"Florence. That was when I thought you had given me up. I had no idea then that you would return to me!"

"You mean to say that you were as close as that to a woman?"

He was silent.

"What sort of a woman was she? Tell me about her!" she went on relentlessly, in a hard, cold voice, so unlike the warm, passionate voice a few moments before.

"What is there to tell? She was just a woman, whom I didn't love."

"But you were close to her, a woman of the streets, so close. She was a woman of the streets, wasn't she? . . . And I thought I was to be your first! . . . Another illusion gone. So they go, one by one. . . ."

"Look here, Winnie, don't you understand? I was longing for you. It wasn't my fault that you had left me. I was alone and in utter despair. It was dark. . . . I tried to imagine it was you. I was sick with myself afterward. I have not ceased loving you for an instant, and I have suffered. I had made up my mind to tell you in any case. I have given up everything to come and see you. After that, I thought nothing could keep us apart. . . . Do you want me to go?" he asked suddenly.

"It seems to me that I ought to feel offended, not you!" she replied.

For some time she sat like a stone, and said not a word. He took her cold hand, and covered it with kisses.

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"I suppose," she said at last, "I must accustom myself to the idea . . . that I am to be second to a street woman. I think," she added, "I'll go and give myself to the first man that wants me, before giving myself to you. That would be only just!"

"Don't say that!" he exclaimed in misery, but in his heart: "I'll never tell the truth to a woman again!"

After two days they were reconciled, and just before his departure for Philadelphia, she fastened her arms around his neck and said with a great tenderness:

"I don't feel like letting you go, not even for a few days. I never want to let you out of my sight again. I love you so!"

CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE AGAIN

He spent a week in Philadelphia, and he afterwards remembered it as a series of bitter and fragmentary impressions. There were the leagues of erect sleepy streets with rows of little red brick houses stretching into infinity. The same sense of apathy and futility hung over the town, in which he had spent the best part of his life, as when he had left it. There was the same frozen figure of William Penn on the tall tower of the ugly City Hall, with new snow on the brim of his hat. There were the same slow-moving yellow trolleys and the same intermittent, depressing clank of their gongs. His soul and body froze in the city of his unhappiness.

The same pall of doom hung over the Gombarov household, and as in other days it caused his limbs to grow numb, robbed him of his will. Stepfather Gombarov stood over the same slant reading desk and went on collecting material for his colossal History of Comparative Cultures, Ancient and Modern, Oriental and Occidental, of which he was yet to do a line of actual writing. He had withered, had become but a shadow

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of himself. His deafness had grown worse; you had to shout in his ear to make him hear. It was pitiful to see what had become of his once sturdy, energetic frame. He was a broken, a wasted man. Only his brain lived on, the dream of himself had lived on. And as Gombarov looked at his stepfather, who had caused such havoc in all their lives, he could no longer hate him, only pity him. After all, he too had been a victim. Nature had endowed him with rich gifts, which other places and other times might have made use of. Simply wasted!

The two years had also greatly aged his mother, but as before she was brave and all-enduring. Mother and son understood one another for the first time. He understood the love she had given that strange, gifted, now broken man. Likewise he understood that it was such as she, capable of such love as hers, that he had sought in his own love, and that such love was a rare, rare thing, to be found only beyond the seven fairy kingdoms.

As for the rest, Dunya was the same affectionate Dunya, helping the family all she could in spite of her own two young ones; Raya was the same old Raya, with a heart of pure gold, working at artificial flowers by day and helping evenings at home, a frustrate soul. There was Sonya an invalid, and there was Katya suffering from imaginary illnesses. The integrally honest Absalom, who had given up Art after a four years' infatuation because he saw no place for it in a mechanised society, was a bookkeeper, admired and beloved by all who came in contact with him for the chastity of his soul. Misha was home on a visit. He was working in a Government scientific institution in Detroit, and he sent all his earnings home, all but what he required for his bare necessities. He was a mathematical genius, in character like his father, an eternal child. Margaret, the youngest, now a

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pretty girl of seventeen, was, with the exception of Dunya, the most cheerful of the Gombarovs, but child-like and guileless like the rest. All the Gombarovs had gifts, but curiously they remained misfits in an industrial society, anachronisms in an age of machines. In this new world they were like flowers clinging desperately to the side of a rock, which had not sufficient earthiness for them to dig their roots deep in.

His last vision, as he caught the trolley for the railway station, was that of his mother, a small, somewhat hunched figure, standing on the snowed-up sidewalk and looking towards him in an attitude of unutterably tender wistfulness.

One thing he afterwards remembered of his visit to the City of Brotherly Love with a peculiar satisfaction, and that was his call on the *New World*. His old colleagues were all there. They immediately surrounded him with the curiosity that practical, sensible men, frustrate in their hearts, had for a nomad and adventurer, who had dared to cast off his chains of sloth and comfort. His old chief and friend, Mr. Clarke, came in and extended him a hearty welcome with both hands, exclaiming:

"Have you come back to us? Are you ready to roll up your sleeves and join the boys?"

Gombarov looked quizzical.

"I am not joking," said Mr. Clarke, catching his look. "I promised to keep the job open for you a year. You've been away two. But I won't hold that up against you. We miss you here!"

Gombarov's thoughts for an instant concentrated on the slimness of his purse and on the hopelessness of his outlook. Here was a chance to obtain material security. The temptation was great. His hesitation lasted some seconds, but a wave of pride and defiance sweeping over him, he answered firmly:



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"No, I haven't come for that!"

He, a penniless beggar, was defying the cruel gods. It was good to defy the gods!

THICK, AND FASTER!

He returned to New York with a little over fifty dollars in his pocket. This was to pay for his subsistence there and for a ticket to take him back to London. And then? The heaviness of his heart increased in ratio to the lightening of his purse. And in his week's absence he had received but one brief note from Winifred. Considering the fervency of their parting, this note was as the breath from an ice chest. It caused him not a little misgiving.

He went direct to the Gwynnes, investing a dollar on the way in violets, which Winifred loved. He greeted her affectionately, but to his chagrin, she turned her head so that his kiss intended for the lips miscarried to the cheek. His heart went numb. She seemed cold and indifferent. He decided to be patient. Women were sometimes like that. Two days passed, and her mood did not change.

"Do you realise," he asked her one evening, "that in a few days I shall be returning to London?"

She made no reply.

"Perhaps," he continued, "I shouldn't have come!"

"Why did you?"

"As if you didn't know! You yourself begged me to come. And I have given up everything to please you."

"It isn't nice of you to harp on that. You wanted to come, didn't you? You did it to please yourself!"

What could he say after that? It would be futile to remind her of those clamorous letters, entreating him to come over, "if only for one wee little instant!"



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"I suppose you and your mother have talked me over in my absence and decided that it won't do to tie yourself up with a failure?"

"You always blame mother! She is the dearest soul in the world. But you are not the same John that I once knew. You are somehow different. Can't we be friends?"

"I see it is time for me to go!" He rose. He began wrapping up some things he had there, prolonging the operation to give her a chance to think over the course she was pursuing.

"You are not going? Like that?"

"How should I go? Rejoicing? I know when I'm not wanted!"

"But you are expected with us at Roneys' tomorrow night. They've asked some people to meet you!"

"You can give them my apologies. Give them any excuse you like! Good-by!"

She started weeping.

"What is the use of that? It is your will, not mine. It is for me to weep. Good-by!"

And he walked out.

A fine snow was falling, and melted as it fell. The ground was covered with sleet, and his feet sagged in it as if they were walking over wet sponges, which oozed their cold moisture into his low English shoes, not made for coping with a New York winter. He felt empty, poignantly empty, as a shell walking, only conscious of his extremities, numbed feet and hands and a numbed brain. He did not want to go back to his cold empty room. Where should he go? He wanted warmth, the warm contact of a male presence. He decided he would look up Roney at his office. He hoped he would be in. He could not bear a disappointment. He ascended the nearest elevated station. Ascending, there was the un-



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comfortable feeling of cold, wet drops dripping. As he held on to the cold, iron banister, one drop struck his nose, another went down his neck. The station platform was deserted. The lights of the train approached, precipitately. There was an impulse to jump, to end it all, this ridiculous farce of life. The train pulled up with a harsh, grating sound. He took a seat. A row of sallow, tortured faces seemed to gape at him. He felt an Ishmael, a Pariah, a Wandering Jew.

He got out near Park Row, once more trudged over wet sponges. Thank God, Roney was in!

"What's the matter, John?" Roney looked at his friend's ashen-green face, and guessed the truth. "Anyhow, let's go to the Press Club. We can have a drink and a chat there!" And he took Gombarov affectionately under the arm.

"I have come to offer apologies," said Gombarov, once they were comfortably seated near the radiator over drinks. "I can't come to your party tomorrow. I want you to know why." And Gombarov told him.

Roney whistled. "I call it a bit thick to bring you all the way over for this. A real dirty trick!" He put a hand on Gombarov's shoulder. "Are they coming tomorrow?"

"I believe so!"

"Well, leave it to me! I'll tell them what I think of it, you may bet on that!"

They parted at one. Gombarov went to his lodgings. To sleep? Was it likely?

The snow went on falling.

BRAIN JAZZ!

His head on the pillow, his body curled up between the sheets, his numbed brain began to thaw and to release all manner of thoughts, harsh, jangling, full of contrariety, like

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the tunes of the band he had heard on the evening of his arrival. His mind was in a state of jazz, was jazz.

Three Gombarovs sat somewhere in his brain and manipulated the instruments of his mind and soul. One played the harsh notes, another the soft, the third was neutral and punctuated the antithetical tune with the inevitable drum beat: "It had to be!"

"Serve you right!" said the hard, jeering one.

"You have done the best that was in you!" said the soft-voiced one.

"It had to be!" staccatoed the neutral one, on his drum.

"Three times she has fooled you! Ha! Ha!"

"You couldn't have done differently. Greater ones than you have been fooled! It was always thus!"

"It had to be! It had to be!"

"Remember on the ship? What did you call her then? Your one hope, your white girl, your eternity! What now?"

"I was not wrong. She is not to blame. It's the world! Her mother! Poor purse! Circumstance!"

"It had to be! Thump! Thump!" and three voices, together, cried, "Hey, huh-h!"

The jazz band of three Gombarovs played a tune in his brain. It was a tune of dissolution, a tune of chaos, and to this tune, his being, drawn and held by the sensuous allure of Death, and gripped by her invisible, passionate, tender fingers, danced with her, limb to limb, breaths mingling, the jazz of dissolution, the jazz of death. Gombarov wanted to die. He had nothing to live for. He felt so poor, so empty, so alone. And his mind went on playing its jazz tune.

"You've had your chance! You should have taken her, possessed her, filled her with yourself! And she would have been yours!"



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"I did not want to hazard the future! I did not think that she could possibly desert me, not after my loving her so, not after my coming three thousand miles to see her!"

"It had to be! It had to be!"

"Fool! Are you a man? You should have possessed her! Had you come thrice three thousand miles, it would have been the same! Not by the length of his journeys does a woman judge a man!"

"I thought to conquer her by civilised means, by great love, by suffering, by sacrifice!"

"It had to be! It had to be!"

"Nonsense, man! Woman is primitive, man is a savage! They deceive, seduce one another, by putting on veils of illusion. But in the end, man? They strip off their veils, tear their illusions into tatters, leap at one another like savages!"

"That is not the whole truth. I cannot believe it. I will not believe it! I will be myself, if I am to lose everything! I want a beyond-love! I admit, present facts are against me! I also know that there are others who believe as I do, and that there is great happiness for men and women if they could only will to find it!"

"It had to be! It had to be!"

"Bah! You are a greater fool than I had thought! A romantic fool! As foolish as Don Quixote! Anyhow, it doesn't matter! Your Dulcinea was only Aldonza!"

"No! No! I shall persist in thinking her Dulcinea! There's something fine in her! But she could not stand up against a practical, mercenary world. Besides, I am sure her mother had a finger in the pie!"

"It had to be!"

"You make me sick! You should have caught her by the

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throat, and beaten her, had your will of her! She would have liked that! And she would have been yours."

"I wonder. . . . But even if it is true. . . . I wanted to win her in a different way! If I have no power to win but by arrogance and force, then I have no power. That is what is hardest to bear! I have failed. I have not enough inner power! And I needed just that to conquer the outer world! I am weak! I have failed! There's but to die, or to bear one's cross! That, too, requires power!"

"It had to be! It had to be!"

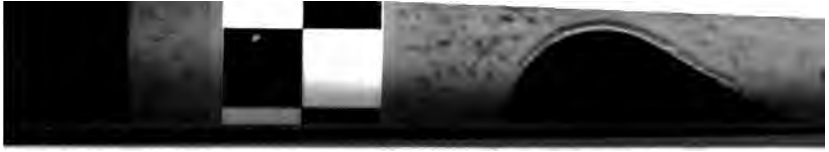
"Die? No, you'll not die. Need I remind you that it is not the first time you have wished to die? Every time she forsook you, you wished to die. Yet you are alive! You may consider yourself lucky one day. . . ."

"No! No! No! I cannot believe it! I cannot believe it! She cannot be so cruel! She will regret this, she will be sorry. She will send for me! She loves me! She, no more than I, can live without love!"

"It had to be! It had to be! It had to be!"

He rose from his bed, lit the gas, and looked in the mirror. The arteries on his temples throbbed, stood out windingly like twin Jordans. It hurt him when he put his fingers there. He remembered what the doctor had told him when Winifred had forsaken him the first time, two years before. He must not worry! He must not be wrought up to such a point that the arteries stood out. Oh, yes, he must try and keep cool! Cool! But he felt more like breaking things. If he could only throw something out of the window, hear the crash of glass! He walked up and down the room, and cursed and blasphemed. It was a great relief.

He managed to get two hours' sleep towards morning. It was warm and there was no vestige of last night's snow. At ten he went out to breakfast, and before eleven returned to



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his room to get a handkerchief. He was planning to walk, his one panacea. But he no sooner reached his room than with astonishing suddenness a high wind rose and huge snowflakes began to fall. They fell thick and fast and persistently, and the violent gusts taking them up swept them in eddies like withered leaves. An hour passed, and neither the snow nor the wind showed signs of abating. The wind, indeed, had increased in velocity, and the flakes fell huger and faster. It was a real blizzard. Gombarov, pacing the room, suddenly remembered that it was his birthday. He muttered, half automatically:

“Cursed be the day on which I was born. . . .”

Then he laughed aloud. He was feeling like an actor in a play, and that made matters easier.

“Fall, snow! Fall faster! Fall furiously! Bury me! Oh, gods, do your worst!”

It was good to feel everything against one. It exhilarated him, made him feel defiant. It was good to stand with one’s back to the wall and hit out with one’s fists.

“Oh, gods!” he cried again, with a fury that vied with theirs, “Oh, gods! Do your worst, and damn you!”

He walked up and down the room, fierce and exultant. If only he could have a fire in the room. His feet felt unpleasantly cold. But his head was hot with fury and defiance. Only with falling twilight, his previous evening’s mood of mental jazz returned and tormented him with its diabolic, variegated tune. The snow went on falling. He had not gone out all that day, but had the landlady bring him up some bread, butter and cheese and a pot of tea. And he continued pacing up and down the room. Several times the telephone bell rang in the hall below, and he wondered whether it was from her. Hope was constantly reborn, and as constantly died.

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WOMAN'S PRIVILEGE

It was the worst blizzard New York had had in twenty years. In some places the drifts were several feet high. Motor cars sometimes skirted round the cleared sidewalks, and motor buses had to be dug out in Fifth Avenue. Armies of men were at work, and the snow was being piled up in huge banks, behind which a tall man could hide. In the dimly lit cross-town streets several hold-ups had occurred.

Bravely, Gombarov went on interviewing editors, but with ill success. He also saw Roney, who told him what happened at the party. Mrs. Gwynne tried to get him aside to explain the causes of Gombarov's absence. But Roney cut her short and told her that the way Gombarov was being treated was "a mean shame." Moreover, he had proposed a toast to his absent friend, which made the Gwynnes uncomfortable.

Evidently, they were still uncomfortable, for on the third day after their parting he had a telephone call before breakfast.

"Come over. I want to see you!" said Winifred.

"What do you want to see me about?"

"I want to talk to you about that little London shop."

This was in reference to a modern art shop that Mrs. Gwynne proposed to start in London. She was giving up her job, and Gombarov had suggested the scheme, which made possible their going to London. He knew the artists personally and could secure their co-operation.

"Is that all?" he laughed. "The shop doesn't interest me! Good-by!" And he hung up the receiver.

Next day at the same hour the telephone bell rang again.

"Do come over," pleaded Winifred. "You won't be sorry!"



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"Are you sure of that?"

"I mean it! Do, please!"

He went over. He entered and stood still. She approached him somewhat shamefacedly, put her arms on his shoulders, hid her face in his bosom.

"I can't do without you," she murmured. "Love is everything, life nothing without love. Forgive me for making you suffer. You mustn't mind me if I get into one of those moods. We women sometimes can't help our moods!"

She appeared chastened. They sat down on the couch and talked quietly.

"I must be leaving for London in a few days," he said. "Anyhow, you and your mother are planning to come over in a month or so, so the parting won't be a long one. It will be good to meet over there. I cannot say that I feel at home in New York. You'll find me more cheerful over there. And it will be jolly to show you round. In London, too, you can live more cheaply, and amuse yourself without being a multi-millionaire!"

"I do not feel like letting you out of my sight, not for an instant, John!"

The day was fine, there was a thaw in the air. They went walking through Central Park, and were happy.

Next day he bought his ticket for London, third-class, on a sister liner to the one on which he had arrived. It was to sail nine days hence.

Three days went by fairly happily. Then again she began to cool. Remembering her injunction not to mind her woman's moods, he tried patience and silence. He let two days pass. But four days remained of his stay. She might consider that. She might try to look cheerful. He did not want to leave for London, consumed by doubts. And he let



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another day pass, without change in her mood. In the evening he had some words with her.

All next day he spent in walking the streets and in sitting in cafés, deliberating. He was moved inwardly as by some impersonal spirit, detached and compelling, urging and lashing him on, fiercely, inevitably, not to be turned aside by any intimate will. That evening the final test would come. Moved by this greater will he would force it, though he lose his kingdom. He hardened himself. He might have to pay the full price to retain his manhood.

He disregarded the telephone message left at the house for him to join them at dinner. He knew this was an overture to peace, but he disregarded it. He came after dinner.

"Hello, John!" she said softly, as she opened the door to him, dressed in a frock he loved her best in.

"Hello!" he greeted her with constrained coolness. "I want to talk to you!" And she looked so sweet and conciliatory that he felt the need of further hardening himself.

They sat down on the couch. She was very close to him, nestled her head up against him. But he disregarded this. For some moments neither spoke. It was hard for him to speak, with her so close to him, nestling up to him. His courage wavered, but only for an instant. He went on hardening himself.

"How intuitive women are!" he thought. "She is very nice tonight because she knows what's coming! But if she really loves me, she will cling to me, surely not let me go even after what I have to tell her. If she doesn't, then it doesn't matter. I must have all or nothing, and in the final analysis this is the test!"

He hardened himself, held himself taut, at last cleared his throat, and said without glancing at her:

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"I have been thinking matters over. Things can't go on like this. I can't have you loving me every other day. You asked me to overlook your moods, and I have tried to. But when you consider that I've only another three or four days' stay, such moods become wholly incomprehensible. I simply can't grasp them. I don't want to leave for London tortured with doubts as to whether you love me. . . . Perhaps, it is better we should part for good. . . ." His voice broke. He waited for the words that would settle his fate.

She edged away from him somewhat before she spoke.

"So you think the same as I do!" came from her, in a voice without a tremor.

Gombarov felt faint at these words, and his heart was filled with hollow echoes of the irrevocable. She went on:

"I am so glad we are of the same opinion. I thought possibly I might be in the wrong!"

These were hard words, words of doom. He had made his gambler's throw, and he had lost. He said nothing. He heard her voice, sounding muffled as from behind a wall:

"Our temperaments are not suited to one another. Anyhow, you haven't enough money to support a wife. . . ."

That roused him. "Why not put the last first? Well, it's time to clear out!" He rose.

"Don't go yet!" She gave a little agitated cry, and put a hand on his arm.

"What now? Why shouldn't I go?"

"There's the little shop to talk over."

He faced her. "The little shop?"

"Yes, the little art shop in London. Mother, you know, has given up her job, because you promised your help with the little shop. She can't do it without you!"



BABEL

He was dumbfounded. He had not counted on this. It was not on his programme.

"Is that why you came back to me the last time?" he asked fiercely.

"No! No! That wasn't it at all!" She gave again her agitated little cry.

"It seems to me," he went on, "that your instinct of self-preservation is pretty well developed, if your love isn't. Have you no consideration for my feelings at all that you expect me to work with you two after this? Must you add insult to injury? Isn't it enough that I have crossed the sea on a wild goose chase, and spent every red cent I had and borrowed in doing it?"

"There, you go harping on that!"

"Surely, it is too much. . . ."

Winifred sat down, burying her face in her hands, and began to weep.

"Good-by!" said Gombarov, stretching out his hand.

"Mother!" sobbed Winifred, rising and going to the door of the next room. "He is going!"

Mrs. Gwynne entered.

"Mother, he refuses to help you with the little shop!"

"How can I?" he asked, looking and feeling helpless. "Winifred doesn't want me, so what is there for me to do but go? Put yourself in my place!"

"And I've given up my job because you. . . ."—and the elder woman picked up a handkerchief to wipe her tears.

Gombarov felt helpless between these two sobbing women, as he stood irresolutely fingering his hat, certain that no knight errant ever found himself in so embarrassing a position as this. Women's tears had a way of unmanning him, though

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he could be unflinching in circumstances more tragic. He fought with himself.

"You must let me think it over!" he said at last, seeking some excuse to get away.

But the two women went on sobbing.

"All right!" he said, in desperation. "I'll help you, if you insist on it!" The words were wrung out of him by his old pity, which reasserted itself. Who knew: perhaps he had really taken the bread out of their mouths? He did not want anyone to suffer on his account.

They dried their tears and exchanged irrelevancies with him, which he later did not remember. They were as fragments of conversation one hears in nightmares and which escape on waking. He only remembered Winifred saying:

"You'll see us before you go, won't you? Tomorrow is Sunday, and you'll not be having any business. Why not come round, and if the day is nice we can take a walk through the Park?"

"Thank you. You had better not expect me. Good-bye!"

Next day he wrote and said that after thinking matters over he had decided that it was impossible for him to assist them in London.

"IT IS YOU, O HARLOT CITY!"

Two days later he sailed. Roney was there to see him off. Roney said:

"Look here, I don't want you to be short when you get to London. I got my pay today. I propose to lend you twenty-five dollars. Don't say, No!"

Roney was a brick. He stayed with Gombarov until he boarded the ship. There was a long friendly pressure of hands, and impulsively they kissed one another. Gombarov

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ascended the gang-board, waved a farewell from deck, and sought his berth.

He had an upper berth in a four-berth cabin, which was quite an international affair, his fellow inmates consisting of an Irishman, an Englishman and a Czech. The last, a ponderous, globular mass of flesh and entrails, weighing twenty stone or more, slept in the berth under Gombarov's. He invariably lay on his back, and the apex of his paunch reached half way towards the upper berth. He loved lying down, and once he lay down he slept, and once he slept he snored. When he did not whistle or play the flute, he hummed like a kettle before coming to a boil or made hoarse noises like a seal, or blew on the trumpet, or imitated a fog horn, or drew a deep note as from a bass viol, or simply groaned and moaned, often achieving extraordinary combinations and contra-puntal effects; and all the while his globular shape heaved audibly, and to Gombarov's distress, pumped great volumes of breath upward. He was like a universe in himself, obscene and disgusting, and his emanations overwhelmed one, there was no escaping them. And Gombarov, unhappy and distraught over the ways of the world, perceived in him a symbol of unutterable things then stirring across the face of the earth. For in speaking to him, Gombarov discovered that the man was a good citizen, had a house in Springfield, Illinois, was the father of eight children, loved comfort, had two bath-tubs and one gramophone, and always voted the straight Republican ticket. He had achieved all this and more by his own efforts, and now he was "coming home" for a spell "to see the old folks."

The Irishman in the opposite upper berth brought three bottles of whiskey on board with him, was indeed drunk when he came on board, and when Gombarov entered the cabin offered drinks all around. The Englishman was a sturdy young



BRAIN-STORM

sailor, who took to Gombarov at once, and within a day or so affectionately addressed him as "Jim." He offered to find him a job as a stoker on that ship if he wanted one, and Gombarov felt flattered at being credited by a human bulldog with such high masculine attributes.

Owing to the rate war between German and British lines, the ship was uncomfortably crowded, twelve hundred third-class passengers going to Europe as against two hundred odd who had sailed for America on the sister-liner. But among the two hundred he remembered the simple faces, the brilliant peasant costumes, the half dozen fiddles, the spirited merry-making and dances. Among these twelve hundred he noted the complacent faces of the do-wells, the drab standard suits, three wretched mouth-organs, and furtive groups of males sniggering over smutty stories.

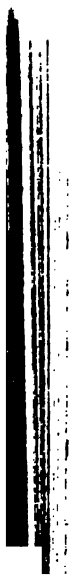
Hope was the name of the ship he had sailed on from England, and the name of this ship was Resignation. But there were six days of fine weather, thank God for that! He basked on deck all day long, like a cat, and the sky and the sun and the sea absorbed the poison of his discontent. Only when he had left New York, just as the ship pulled out and he watched the receding buildings from the stern did he experience tempestuous emotion, active sorrow and fury. But there were many passengers on board, and he concealed all that strove within for dramatic expression. He shook a mental fist at the receding city and her towers of stone and steel.

"It is you, O harlot city!" he cried in his soul, "who are responsible! For all! For all! It is you who have thwarted and corrupted the human soul! It is you who have robbed me of my own! Go on, then, dancing round your golden calf! For your doom is coming some day! Or there is no justice, and no God!"





BOOK IV
BEFORE THE FALL



CHAPTER XI: LOVE'S METAMORPHOSIS

"Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence. From these Contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passion that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy. . . . Energy is Eternal Delight."

—BLAKE

"DAMN BRACES, BLESS RELAXES"

It was good to be back in London. On an evening late in March he arrived at Paddington from Fishguard. It was warm, a fine rain was falling. He did not mind the wet. So glad was he to feel the stones of London under his feet that he could have bent down and kissed them. He boarded the underground train for West Kensington, where he knew a young cheerful couple, the Carltons, Phil and Moll, a struggling author and his wife, living in a modest apartment. He had been of some assistance to them in various ways, and it occurred to him that he might find temporary "digs" in the same house.

Moll, with a baby in her arms, opened the door to him.

"You don't look the same man at all!" she said in North of England accents. "What do you think, Phil?" This to her husband, who suddenly appeared in the door. "What's happened to you, man?"



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"A lot of things!" he said enigmatically. "Do you think I can have a room in the house?"

The landlady was called, and he was accommodated on the top floor.

The top floor, a large one, was occupied by suffragettes, save for his own small room, which was no wider than a corridor. He prepared his own breakfast. There was a small kitchen at the back, which he shared with the suffragettes, much to the annoyance of one or two of them. They belonged to the militant section of the movement, and some of them had been in Holloway; in talking with them and in studying their demeanour he was not long in coming to the conclusion that they were moved by an intense, consuming hatred of men, for no reason than that men were men.

His immediate neighbour, Mrs. Thomas, had deserted or been deserted by her husband, who had used her "as a chattel" until she revolted and refused him access; he was now living with a barmaid. Mrs. Thomas was small and feminine, and she shared rooms with a Miss Clackton, who was tall and masculine and walked with the firm gait of a grenadier. All day Miss Clackton was away at the suffrage headquarters. In the evening she returned to a meal prepared by Mrs. Thomas. Through the wall he could hear their voices, endearments and muffled supplications. They "darlinged" one another a great deal.

The back room, next to the kitchen, was occupied by two girls, one pretty and lively, whom he tried to talk to, only to be rebuffed in a way that seemed to imply: "Men are beneath me!" But when he was in the kitchen in the evening preparing a cup of tea, he could hear her sensual, hysterical laughter, as of a girl in a man's embrace. For some time he could not understand this contradiction.



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He knew they resented his being there; intuitively they must have sensed his being a male with definitely male feelings. They maintained, however, an outward friendliness, and once or twice in the kitchen Mrs. Thomas condescended to exchange views with him on the sex question, and revealed herself as utterly opposed to any bodily surrender of woman to man, leaving him to imply that if there were no other way to breed, the human race had better die out. She harped on the "ugliness" of the contact, the hatefulness of "Love's consummation," "the clumsy method"—borrowing a phrase from John Stuart Mill—Nature had devised for bringing children into the world. She was eaten up with hatred of Nature and God and Man for having things all their own way, a wicked way!

"I agree with you," he said, with moderation, "that women ought to have the vote if they want it, that is, on economic grounds. But there is no use merely doubling the vote, for I take it that there are as many shades of opinion among women as among men. The question of women voting would never have come up but for the invention of the machine and the mechanisation of society. In fact, all modern problems have arisen with the machine!"

"I don't see that at all! Women were before machines!"

"Don't you see," he went on, "the origin of woman suffrage dates from the introduction of the spindle and the loom, when women and children went to work for the first time and became separate and distinct economic units, and the old family unit was broken. And there are other problems for which the machine is responsible. You complain of England's overpopulation, but it is the machine that has enabled England to receive food from abroad in exchange for manufactured products, and so the population has multiplied. You com-

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plain of what you call the "man-made world," as being dull, ugly and uninteresting, and again you leave the machine to blame for it has killed interestingness and all the joy of individual working.

Just as I personally cannot but regard woman suffrage as an evil in itself, but a necessary evil in our complicated mechanical age. It is but another cog in the machine of society necessary to the machine, but as useless really as are the other cogs in the whole machine, for that matter. If one cog goes wrong, the whole machine goes wrong—and the cogs are always going wrong."

Mrs. Thomas hesitated. She called his "a man's point of view." She liked the machine and all the comforts it brought, and if it was responsible for woman coming in her consciousness then she liked it the more.

"But don't you see," replied Gambartv, "it hasn't changed the fundamental problems at all, and a woman's surrender to a man can no more be a matter for congratulation than it was before. It can be neither a question of money, nor of law or equality. It is a question of love, which is above all things."

"But how can there be love without equality?"

"Love is not a matter of understanding between equals," asserted Gambartv by this time exasperated. "It is quite usually, as a matter of fact, an understanding and ultimate reconciliation between unequal beings. It is a fusion of elements as widely opposed as fire and water."

"Very likely," said Mrs. Thomas, with a cynical smile. "And what happens? Fire makes water boil, water puts fire out."

She smiled and knew it. Gambartv, usually ready with his answer, was flustered a little, engaged, etc. as having been



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bested by a woman. All the same, he said to himself, he was right, and she a miserable "man-hater"!

He had enough problems of his own to worry about. The needs of his stomach generated an energy, and he rose every morning early to work on articles. When he heard the scraping of toast in the kitchen—for the masculine Miss Clackton invariably allowed it to burn, kitchen-work being beneath her dignity—he knew it was time to get up. Within a fortnight of his return he had half a dozen articles going the rounds, so far without luck. He was in a bad way. His money was running low. One day, lying on his cot, he said to himself:

"If nothing comes tomorrow, I shall go tramping. Do odd farm jobs until something turns up!"

That very evening a small cheque arrived. The next morning another.

"Curious!" he thought. "Things always seem to turn when they are at their worst. Is it accident? But as a fatalist and something of a predestinarian I cannot quite believe in accident! Of course, these ideas do not exclude accident as a deliberate part of the process!" And, as at other times, he was moved by a strange faith, which defied and challenged all reason.

He was starved for a woman. For awhile his mind turned to Judith, whom he had not seen since that unforgettable day of her mother's death. He made a search for her in the cafés of the West End, and finally visited the house in Mile End Road. Other people lived there. "So it is always," he reflected, as he departed, crestfallen. "Too late! Too late!"

Among the visiting suffragettes was a quiet, little, blue-eyed, fair-haired woman, a Mrs. Lucy Reval, who alone appeared friendly to him. When his door was open, she would

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sometimes walk in, glance with respect at the scattered pages of manuscript and engage in talk with him. Despite her outward quiet she had a reputation for being fiercely militant. She had seen the inside of Holloway, where she went on a hunger-strike. He sensed in her a fondness for him. She had attractions, and he liked her.

One day, when she entered the room in her casual way, he suddenly drew her to him and kissed her. She did not protest, but merely asked:

"Do you like me? You know, I am very fond of you."

They made an appointment for tea the next day at her flat.

"Do bring some of your writings, and read to me," she said.

It was a warm April day, and she was dressed in white summery garments when he called. Her slender arms were visible through the thin material. She placed him in a comfortable chair and arranged a cushion at his head, then went to the kitchen and returned with a tray containing sandwiches, cakes and tea. She sat down opposite him and they talked over the tea like two old pals.

"How do you get on with your neighbours?" she asked.

"Not very well. I have the misfortune to be a man, and I can't conceal the fact from them."

"They are rather fanatical about men. Now, I don't object to men as individuals. It's their system I detest. Not that I blame Mrs. Thomas. Poor thing, she's had a dreadful time with her husband! And there are ever so many women in the same fix. Your English husband today uses his wife just as he would a steak and kidney pie, to satisfy his appetite! There's no flavour, no finesse in the relation. I myself had to chuck my husband, because he didn't know how to treat a woman."

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"What I don't understand is how those two women can stand one another."

"You mean Mrs. Thomas and Miss Clackton."

"They are such antitheses! And the Clackton girl is too much of a man to suit me!"

Mrs. Reval smiled, seemed about to speak, but said nothing.

"What made you become a suffragette? You don't seem like the others!"

Again she laughed. "A psychoanalyst was indirectly to blame!" She paused.

"How could that be?"

"It was like this. I was at a loose end for some time after I left my husband. Didn't know what to do with myself. I tried a millinery shop for a while, but got sick of it. I tried other things, but everything tired me. I wanted to do things that meant something. It was too late for me to dabble in the arts. I grew quite sick of myself, worried myself almost into a breakdown. Then I heard of psychoanalysis, which is becoming all the rage just now. And I went to an analyst. After several visits—at a couple of guineas per—I received the information that I had a surfeit of unused creative energy, and that I must divert it into some channel, do something that would really interest me. As it happened, I met Mrs. Thomas at the time, who had also just left her husband, and she drew me into the movement. It was what I wanted, plenty of action and mental excitement. Besides that, I felt that I was really doing something to help my sisters!"

"In other words," said Gombarov, explaining matters half to himself, "not being able to find love or the creative life, you set out to destroy, break windows and the like!"

"But surely," she urged, "in destroying, I am creating in



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a way. Making room for new creation, perhaps. Clearing ground for a better future for the race!"

"Maybe you are right. What I can't understand is your destroying masterpieces of art. You cannot replace the Rokeby Venus. . . ."

They went on threshing out the matter. He liked her frankness. She was as frank as a Russian revolutionary. He saw that she was pleased when he told her so.

"We are revolutionaries!" she said. "We are sacrificing ourselves to create a new world!"

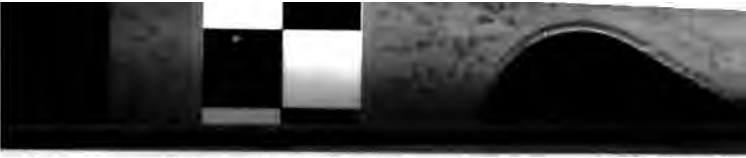
She removed the tea things, the tea-table also. She drew the curtains, lit the fire in the grate, and they moved their chairs closer. As they talked, their hands sometimes touched, found themselves at last clasped. In the flickering firelight their eyes shone with a strange, passionate lustre. The flames in their eyes leapt toward one another. He moved his chair closer, their knees touched. His right arm stole round her shoulder, gathered her in. Her head slowly, gently, reclined against him. They had ended their discussion of problems, and they sat in happy silence, which they feared to break. At last, she looked up at him and asked:

"Are you by any chance a hypnotist?"

He laughed. "Not that I know of! What makes you ask?"

"Because I don't understand your power over me. I feel as if I have been hypnotised. I've never been drawn to a man since my husband failed me, yet here you come along and do what you like with me! I simply cannot explain it!"

She suddenly released her hand from his, shook her head free, and her fingers dived into her bosom. She pulled something out, and held it up against the light. It was a little whip.



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"Do you see this?" she asked, laughing nervously.

"It's a whip! What an extraordinary thing to keep in so charming a bosom! If it were a serpent, it couldn't have astonished me more."

"I always keep it there! I use it at meetings, to make a way for speakers when men in the audience become obstreperous!"

"What a terrible person!"

"You may well think so, after what I shall say to you!"

He waited breathlessly. He knew that something unexpected was coming, but was not prepared for what came.

"Do you see this little whip? . . . Do you see it? It is a whip, isn't it?"

"Yes . . ." he murmured.

"Well, I surrender it to you—as a symbol! You can do what you like with me!"

He suddenly thought of Nietzsche's saying: "When you go to see a woman, bring a little whip with you!" But here was a woman actually offering him the little whip, that he might do as he liked with her.

He took hold of the whip, and at the first contact with it his whole body felt an infusion of energy, and moved by a sudden savage impulse he flung it aside, and lifting the little woman in his arms bore her into the next room.

THE WHIRLPOOL

It was a summer not to be forgotten by Gombarov.

His intimacy with Lucy did not cause him to forget Wini-fred, whom, in spite of his better judgment, he desired more ardently than ever, but his desire now had few of the old attributes. If she had been attainable and within his reach, she would with her body have provided the holocaust

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so necessary for his deliverance from the wrath of the gods. His sensual being, like Moses' mystic bush, flared and flared with a fierce flame, which would not abate. He had Lucy, but he needed yet other outlets for his savage energy.

He found one such outlet in the militant, anarchic arts of the day. Fierce, defiant and contemptuous, they were in accord with his new mood. They challenged the whole dull fabric of the old world, flaunted their violent flaming colours against the surrounding drabness, defied decrepit convention, violated complacency, comfort and boredom, and flung their jeering, semi-barbaric malice in the face of the bourgeois respectabilities. The artists were avenging themselves on the Nineteenth Century for its deposition of Beauty, creative life, from the councils of humanity, and for the usurpation of its place by sprawling, flabby, amorphous Suburbia. Not that all artists were conscious of social revolt; some of them were genuinely striving to break new ground, to create new living forms, but in their indifference and nonchalance was a gesture of revolt even greater than that of the writers of manifestoes.

In spite of the international character of the new art, an extraordinary spirit of nationalism broke out in the leading group of English ultra-moderns. These declared that they were tired of French self-appointed domination in the arts, and asserted that Paris was a usurper, inasmuch as modern art was founded on the principles of the machine, brought into being by the Anglo-Saxon. In a series of manifestoes they proclaimed the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon, and London the natural Capital of modern art. They published these manifestoes in large flaunting types in the *Dynamo*, a huge periodical, exceeding a volume of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in *format* and exposing a cover having all the colours of the rainbow. This group called themselves the Dynamists. "The

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Anglo-Saxon world," they declared, "is the beneficent dynamo scattering light to France and the benighted, decadent Latins, as well as to other nations." Strange to say, among the leading members of this pro-English group were Tobias Bagg, an American; Jan Maczishak, a Pole; and Rafael Guggenheim, a Jew. This group militantly entrenched itself, and now and then sallied out to subvert the depredations of the "decadent, feminine Latins." They laughed to scorn the attempts of the leading Italian Futurist to make propaganda in England by advocating football in the home of sport and chanting the praises of trains, motor cars and aeroplanes in the home of the machine. But they made no effort to controvert his cry of "The glory of war and contempt of women!"

Gombarov saw a great deal of Tobias Bagg in those days. Bagg, who had so often declared marriage to be against his principles, had lately married, and on his return from the honeymoon was very busy on Dynamist manifestoes, when he was not engaged in translating Arabic love poems. Like other artists of the day, in order to live he had to lead, so to speak, a "double life." A Yiddish proverb goes, "You can't dance at two weddings!"—but Bagg accomplished this seemingly impossible miracle, at the risk of being called inconsistent in one camp, a *passéiste* in the other.

Gombarov hung on the edge of this group, and without actually being one of them drew from them a kind of blind energy, which he applied in his own way against the complacency of the academicians. He sympathised with the Dynamists in the degree that he recognised them as thwarted creators who were manufacturing a kind of spiritual dynamite wherewith to shake the world out of its smugness. More than they knew they were feeling the pulse of a sick, weary world and presaged a catastrophe for the good of its thwarted

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soul. But London was amused at the antics of the revolutionaries. Lady So-and-So and Lady So-and-So were in the fashion by becoming their patronesses. The comic and even the serious journals had good sport. A great sensation was caused by a poet who came to a Futurist lecture attired in violet trousers, dark red jacket and red shoes. What would they be up to next?

The will to live and the will to die, the will to create and the will to destroy, went hand in hand. The most extraordinary happenings were reported in the press: suffragist "atrocities," piquant divorce cases, murders, Irish home rule, Mormon agitation, threats of a universal strike, the assassination of the Austrian Archduke, etc., etc. No individual but seemed touched and infected by the hectic spirit of the day. The old looked on askance, the academies passed resolutions condemning the new tendencies, which was like King Canute commanding the sea-tides to stop.

A great tidal wave was sweeping up old illusions and romantic impulses, old pities, too! Little of pity remained in Gombarov after the blows that had been inflicted on him; they filled him with rancour and malice and these he sometimes vented on poor Lucy. But once having surrendered the little whip to him, Lucy submitted, indeed seemed to love him the more, though she continued her suffragist activities and constantly warned him that she was being watched by the police.

One evening at the flat, Lucy, her long hair down, attired in an attractive night-dress, nestled up to him like a small, fond child. But he was thinking of Winifred. Unaware of the cause of his tortured abstraction, she caressed his body and limbs with warm hands, drunken with loving.

"My pet!" she murmured. "Please don't worry. Don't

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think of the outside world. Just think of the world as this spot, and you and I, just you and I! The other world doesn't exist, simply doesn't exist! Just get closer to me, pet, closer to me! You can't be too close to me. If I could only get into your head, and your heart, and put my hand on what's troubling you, I should willingly, oh, how willingly, take it all upon myself! If I only could!"

"If you only could!" he echoed her, thinking of Winifred. "I don't deserve you, really!"

"Tut! Tut! Darling. You don't know yourself. I only feel that you are being thwarted, warped by something. But you don't know your own strength. You have such potentialities, if you only knew! You have been crushed by your sufferings. Yet some day you may see clearly, then I shall expect great things of you. . . ."

She talked and talked, caressing all the while his body and limbs, with warm, drunken fingers, until she warmed his malice, his thought of Winifred, out of him, and he gathered her to him with a great tenderness, until he no longer felt that either he or she existed, but was conscious only of a single stream of flame flowing through a cohesive indeterminate oneness, without source or goal. But in the very midst of their oneness, total obliteration of self, a thought, an accursed thought, leapt through his mind, flaunting the image of her whom he once had loved with all his soul and in the ecstasy of their oneness he taunted Lucy:

"Well, my little suffragette, where's your suffrage now?"

And she, passionate and humble, indeterminate component of a oneness, replied:

"Don't think of it, my love. I only care for you. What else matters? Only to be destroyed utterly!"

He felt ashamed, and wholly disarmed by her words. He



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nestled against her like a child, silently imploring her compassion. He dropped off to sleep, her fingers running through his hair.

Next morning she prepared breakfast for them both, then, after turning up her face for a kiss, departed for the Suffrage headquarters, where onerous tasks awaited her.

"Do you know," she said to him one evening, "my heart has been less and less in my work since I have known you? I seem to live almost entirely for you. I have become quite an ordinary woman. If they only knew at the headquarters, I believe they would excommunicate me!" She laughed at the thought.

"Why don't you quit it?"

"I can't leave them in the lurch! Not just now. They depend on me so! Who knows?" she said, gravely, "within a week I may be deprived of you!"

"What do you mean?" he said, with alarm.

"You dear!" she said, kissing him. "You see, pet, we are organising a deputation to the King. And it's hardly likely that they'll let us get as far as the Palace gates. That means there will be a scrimmage, and some of us will be spending the night at Holloway."

"Can't I dissuade you from going?"

She shook her head. "I don't know that it isn't better to go." There was a wistful note in her voice. "Don't you see, my love, if I go on loving you, you may get sick of me. But a holiday in Holloway may make you gladder to see me when I get out." She laughed. "I am more far-seeing than you. I've been so happy with you that I often think it can't last. It's more than I had ever expected. And when I think of all those women who have had nothing in their lives, my heart goes out to them. . . ."

"Think it over!" he urged.

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FATE AT HER OLD TRICKS

She could not see him on the evening before the demonstration. There were so many arrangements to make. That very evening, as he wandered abstractedly and alone in Piccadilly, he felt some one touch him on the shoulder, and was dimly conscious of two tall feminine figures confronting him. He looked up.

"You here!" he exclaimed.

It was Winifred and her mother.

"Are you going anywhere in particular?" asked Mrs. Gwynne.

"*Café de l'Empire*," he said, the idea coming into his mind, without forethought.

"Oh, we've heard of it! Do you mind taking us there?" asked Winifred, after an embarrassing silence.

What could he do but consent? After all, it was fate. And he knew the folly of trying to controvert fate. Besides, he was really a little sorry for them, wandering about in London, without knowing a soul.

"Have you been here long?" he asked, as they walked along.

"About a week!"

This fact sank in deeply. They had been in London and had not looked him up.

As if she had guessed what was passing in his mind, Mrs. Gwynne made haste to say:

"We had thought of looking you up, but could not make up our minds. As a matter of fact, we got your address only yesterday from Douglass."

"Are you settling in London?"

"We haven't decided. That depends largely on whether we



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can make a living here. We may go to Paris, where we know the ropes."

A thin flame of hope, like a small worm, wriggled up in his heart.

They secured a good corner seat, from which they could survey the large café. The hour was creeping on towards ten, and newcomers began pouring in. By eleven o'clock there was hardly a vacant seat. The murmur of voices, faint at first, gathered momentum, became a tumult, which rose and fell in undulating cadences, broken only by woman's shrill laughter and the sudden shuffle of dominoes across a marble table. The smoke hung in great clouds and obscured the half-faded frescoes of cupids and nudes, it embraced the old walls and the dingy gilt decoration, and dulled the mirrors into opaque surfaces. Gombarov reflected upon the singular fact that in this haze, at once hectic and tense and fantastic, one did not see whole faces or individuals, but rather, as in a Futurist picture, spots and fragments of persons and faces, for the most part grinning, pieced together along with bits of dingy red plush, to make a modern design, the very soul of disintegration, like a crumb of Camembert under a microscope.

There was a group of Futurists at the next table. They were carrying on a heated discussion.

"We ought to support the suffragettes," one was saying, "in their campaign of destroying *passèiste* masterpieces. We don't want any cemeteries in our midst. We have our own lives to live, and all that hinders us—the old, the decrepit and the traditional—ought to go. They are a good ally!"

"The suffragettes may be on our side, but we are surely not on theirs, George!" put in another, who was called Tom. "For incidentally, we are out to kill woman worship, and don't you forget it! We don't want any petticoat govern-

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ment, or petticoat art, or petticoat morality. What is more, in their heart of hearts the women don't want it, either!"

"I agree with Tom," said a third. "We can support the suffragettes in their destruction, but we cannot support them in principle. . . ."

"Principles, old chap, are a *cliché!*" said the first speaker. "The only good principles are dead principles! I say, we really ought to pass a vote of thanks to those suffragettes! Really, we ought to!"

"Say, boys!" put in Tom. "What do you say to making up a party to see tomorrow's demonstration before Buckingham Palace? It would be jolly to see the bout between the Amazons and the bobbies! It will be a grand hugging time, and I put my money on the bobbies!"

Gombarov explained matters to the Gwynnes, and asked them whether they would like to see the demonstration. They eagerly accepted, and he promised to call for them.

"Yes, those bobbies will put them in their place, you bet!" said Tom. "In a man's arms, I mean!" He grinned at his own poor joke, but suddenly his face unaccountably straightened out, assumed a grave look. The reason for this startling change of countenance was soon explained. A little woman was making her way up the aisle and stopped at the table.

"Tom!" she said in a manner which left no doubt as to who was master of the *ménage*, "isn't it time you went home? Come along at once!"

Tom meekly rose, bade his companions good-night, and followed the little woman out. Tom's fellow Futurists and masters of woman grinned at the fire-eater's humiliating exit.

"Nell is not the girl to stand nonsense from a man!" said George.



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"No!" said the other. "Though Tom is pretty strong on that 'glory of war and contempt of woman' stuff!"

"It all goes into his work!" suggested George.

They laughed.

Gombarov passed a sleepless night. He was wrought up over Winifred's reappearance. He determined to keep cool and await developments. He had the fatalistic feeling that Lucy's premonition of her landing in Holloway was a correct one, and that he had seen the last of her. And so Winifred's reappearance seemed all the more significant! Why should these two females be always crossing and recrossing his path? Surely, the gods were playing cat and mouse with him!

It was a perfect day in early summer, and from all directions people were drifting towards the Palace, to see the fun! Gombarov, with the Gwynnes, took up a position in the neighbourhood of the Queen Victoria monument. It was fitting, perhaps, that this marble image of the late Queen, who reigned supreme in an age when women were not supposed "to do things," much less think of possessing a vote, should be present to witness the reactions her repressive morality and policies had produced. But her ungainly back was turned on the scene. They stood for some time waiting, until shouts and the scramble of the police toward one of the gates of Green Park indicated that the demonstrators were approaching from the direction of Constitution Hill. It was hard to tell from where they stood what was happening; only now and then they caught sight of a woman bolting, making frantically for the Palace gates, a half dozen bobbies in pursuit. They might have been children playing tag. It was "great fun" seeing a woman caught by a smart, fleet-footed bobby and kicking her legs and struggling, while he held her in his arms tight, so tight! "It ain't often she 'as the chance!" as

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Gombarov heard a cockney wit put it. A strange sight, surely, for the Capital of the world, the hub of modern civilisation! They saw many a woman, her clothes torn, hair dishevelled, led by policemen, who, once their charges ceased struggling, were courteous and gentle. Doubtless, some of them had wives with suffragist sympathies, but duty is duty, and one must live. The sympathies of the onlookers were divided. The more fervent "Pros" cheered the women and booed the police, the "Antis" reversed the procedure. The neutrals looked on with mere curiosity. Many saw it as a humorous spectacle and saved themselves the price of a matinée.

"There's an attractive little woman!" exclaimed Winifred, pulling Gombarov by the sleeve. "What a shame!"

Gombarov's heart thumped. It was Lucy being led between two policemen. Her long, lovely hair, parted in the middle, hung loose down her back and over her bosom: it was thus she disarrayed herself for him in hours of tenderness. The torn hem of her skirt dragged behind her. At the sight of her, Gombarov felt all pity and fury: what could he do? Her head erect, she looked straight before her; he tried to catch her eye, but she did not see him.

"I know that woman," said Gombarov, dully, trying to control his emotion.

They looked at him curiously; he wondered whether they suspected.

They went to tea.

He sulked, and was mostly silent. He was undergoing mixed emotions, the emotions of an intellectual-emotional man in our complex civilisation. He was not proud of his thoughts and emotions, but there they were, cutting capers in him. Whether he liked them or not, he had to live with them. Lucy was gone, she had been so passionately fond of him. If only

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he could have returned it in full measure! Oh, yes, he was fond of her, but not half so much. It was not that her enforced separation from him by a few days, or even months, in jail must end their relations; indeed the thought of her suffering softened him. But fond as he was of her he knew that their ways led in different directions; the episode of her arrest had merely happened to take place at the fork in the road.

Winifred he had loved with a fabulous love, and what had she given him in return? His fabulous love was gone, but he still wanted her, wanted her with all the intensity that hatred could give, wanted her that he might wreak his revenge for what she had robbed him of, his fabulous love. He wanted to rob her of something, though that were a poor return for what he had lost. He had no scruples left, and he had had so many! "Too late! Too late! You fool!" he muttered to himself.

The Gwynnes decided to go on to Paris. Gombarov's courtesy and patience failed him. He was rude, and there was a little scene in St. James's Park.

He said to her: "You will regret everything!"

"In other words," intervened her mother, "you pronounce an Oriental curse, is that it?"

Such an idea had never occurred to him, but moved by wrath, he replied:

"Yes, if you like!"

But there was something in the idea Mrs. Gwynne had implanted in him, and in his utter loneliness it took possession of him. And, thereafter, often, when he was sleepless in the long nights, he would pour forth, on the imagined electric currents of the air, akin to waves of wireless, his maledictions against her who had treated him so grievously. He heaped



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his curses upon her with the intensity of one who was equally capable of intense loving.

After that, with all the contriteness of the human heart, he would express his regrets to Adonai and Allah and all the gods he could think of and pray to them to save him from the perdition of his own curses. He was in the intensity of his forlornness like one of those impossible heroes of the Arabian Nights, lost among the maladjustments of the Occident.

CHAPTER XII: IT HAD TO BE

"You have built a tower of terrible questionings, and you have climbed to its summit and gazed at your earth below. And you are proud to have risen in the world, and would lift up other old nations to your height. But I fear you have built upon sand, and your tower is settling . . ."

—Hard Sayings, by EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.

THE RECKONING

TOWARDS the end of July, a bored, thwarted world was rapidly heading toward destruction and chaos. It was rich, and to die.

The proud tower was tottering, tottering. The prophecies of the artists and soothsayers were coming to pass.

Austrian troops had advanced against Belgrade: that was the beginning. Germany and France and Russia had mobilised. The British navy stood in readiness. And during those final, irrevocable days in July, Gombarov had seen artillery passing down Piccadilly after midnight.

Then August. Orators in Hyde Park and in Trafalgar Square were busy denouncing war. The people were not with them. The speakers were heckled. In France Jaurès had been shot. It could not escape the honest observer that the great masses in the European Capitals—in London, as well as in Paris and Berlin—wanted war, wanted it not superficially, but in their heart of hearts, with a deep inwardness, full of knowledge, and proud of its Progress, yet it wanted



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the causes of which were inexplicable even to themselves. Only a few philosophers who, having as it were, psycho-analysed the world, and studied the world's mask as it was shaping, and all the repressed activities and malignant stirrings under the mask, had an inkling of a possible reckoning.

Gombarov, too, felt strange stirrings within himself as the war fever swept Europe. He felt intensely patriotic, intensely pro-English, he, an alien in any country! He did not realise until much later, years later, that it was not war with Germany that he wanted, but war with any country, war in the abstract. The others, too, wanted war in the abstract, though they knew it not. For he, like the others, had been warped and thwarted by a mechanised world which allowed no freedom for creative faculties. The world had wealth and knowledge and all that went under the name of Progress, but no love. It was not a girl who had thwarted him, but the whole of civilisation: he and a million others had been caught and entangled in a complex network, he and a million others had been rendered as impotent as if they had been so many flies caught and held on sticky fly-paper.

The machine, supposed to ease the lot of mankind, had enslaved it, had warped and thwarted human beings by taking the creating out of their hands and made them mere parts, mere cogs of itself. It took the colour and romance out of life, reduced man to a mechanism of service, an instrument of "efficiency," and enthroned Suburbia, Bourgeoisie and mock Democracy, gods of Philistia. It was natural that the chief reaction, the intensest desire for war, should come from Germany, where mechanical efficiency and standardisation had reached greatest perfection. It was above all there that Hatred, long enchanted and asleep under the influence of the hypnotic eyes of Progress, should have at last opened her

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eyes and stared belligerently. That her neighbours should have returned that stare was natural, for they were brothers and they understood one another, and for the great love they bore the other they were to become fratricides; their subconscious eyes, the eyes of God in them, saw that it was better to die than to live in chains.

The historian would be making a profound mistake if he should derive his conclusions from diplomatic documents; diplomats are the instruments of fate, not its arbiters. Granted that Germany was the Judas among the disciples of Progress, let the historian remember the inevitability of Judas, his historical necessity: without him, there could have been no Crucifixion, and therefore no Resurrection, no salvation for mankind. Not in diplomatic documents, then, but in the social conditions, above all, in the arts of the time, the real secret of Armageddon is to be found. The artists were the prophets: they were the first to express the hidden mystery that lived and grew in the subconscious soul of the multitudes: hence, the reaction towards primitivism, excess of bright colour, orgiastic sensation, militancy and revolt. Theirs, if one but knew it, was the handwriting on the wall of Babel, built out of the excess of knowledge, honeycombed with dungeons for the imprisonment of the simplest impulses and the imaginative faculties. And they set forth the doom of the Empire of the Machine, an end to yet another civilisation. The handwriting was not only the handwriting but also the first fissure in the wall.

"If only something would happen!" This longing of man nurtured on Dead Sea fruit seemed in those early days in August in a fair way to be realised. An intense excitement possessed the people, as they bought up the many editions of newspapers and scanned their headlines:



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"Belgium Invaded!"

"Huns Cross Belgian Frontier!"

"Von Kluck Marching on Liège!"

"The Rape of Belgium!"

No more than this was needed to settle whatever doubts existed in the minds of the people. In vain did orators in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square try to stem the tides of loosed passion that swept the land of Nelson and Wellington. A religious apostle at Marble Arch reminded the heckling crowd that war was unthinkable because parts of the Gospel had been translated into at least four hundred and fifty tongues and that the complete Bible was now to be had in over a hundred languages. But a sceptic shouted:

"But there are plenty of wars in that, Governor!"

On the steps of the Nelson column an independent politician and littérateur, a man beloved and of great distinction, an aristocrat in stature and manner, eagle-eyed, blazed at a small crowd.

"Let us not forget!" he cried, "that if we go into this war, we shall be allied with the most tyrannic power in Europe, a Government which for centuries has existed and still exists by oppressing the people. Not even the Middle Ages could show a greater despotism, a more foul oppression! Shall we forget the rule of the Romanoffs, the corrupt dynasty that has shamed our civilisation? Shall we forget the thousands upon thousands of its noble victims, the revolutionaries, friends of the people, who have filled and still fill her foul dungeons? Shall we forget the splendid men and women and noble stripplings against whom the Autocrats of All Russias have sent the Cossacks and their whips? Shall we forget the pogroms of Jews their underlings have instigated? Shall we shake the blood-stained hand of a murderer? . . ."

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"What about poor Bel'jum?" shouted a man in the crowd.

The people, indeed, were greatly exercised over Belgium. Their feelings were generous and genuine, a trump card in the hands of the Government. It was the subject of the ultimatum to Germany. The people waited tensely and expectantly.

It was thought that war would be declared by Parliament at its sitting on the evening of the second. Crowds thronged Whitehall and Parliament Square. They cheered the statesmen whom they recognised in their limousines, some with their wives, going to the House of Commons or to Downing Street. Otherwise a tense, expectant silence prevailed. Gombarov stood on the kerb and with others kept vigil before the Parliament gates. Every instant he expected someone to usher forth with a cry of "War!" After eleven the politicians began to come out of the House. They walked in couples, looked grave and spoke in low voices. The people watched them as gravely and as quietly. There was no war that night.

On the evening of the third the crowds were even greater. Gombarov stood in front of Buckingham Palace. The King, Queen and Princess came out repeatedly on the balcony in response to the clamor, and were cheered each time. Cockney wits came with their girls and made merry.

"Shall we eat German sassingers?" cried one in a voice that carried a great distance.

There was a loud guffaw, and the crowd responded with a long drawn out "No-oo-h!"

"Three cheers for Kaiser Bill!" shouted someone, ironically. Catcalls and hisses greeted this sally.

"Where's Kaiser Bill goin' to 'ave 'is Christmas dinner?"

"In the Tower!" came the reply from another throat.



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"And we'll stuff his turkey for him with grape-shot!"

"Aye, that we will, lad!" put in a North countryman.

This went on a good part of the evening.

Gombarov went round to the barracks near by, and glanced through the railings. Here, in the large open space, the soldiers, grasping each other's shoulders in pairs, danced round wildly and hysterically, and raised savage outcries.

"ON TO BERLIN!"

After eleven o'clock word passed round that war was certain. A considerable portion of the crowd, suddenly detaching themselves from the rest, with boisterous shouts surged down the Mall. Gombarov, drawn into the precipitous movement, was pushed on from behind. The crowd cheered hysterically, and men who had women with them embraced and seized them, where and how they willed. The cause of this outburst was soon apparent. Just ahead was an open taxi, advancing slowly. Standing up on the rear seat was a tall, well-dressed, young woman in scarlet, furiously shouting, and waving a flag with both hands. One foot she had raised on to the folded hood of the taxi, and her action in swinging her body and shoulders caused her short skirts to pull up, and there she stood exposing the somewhat voluminous pink ribbon garters above her round, white-stockinged knees and just above these there emerged a wealth of lace on her white undergarments. She seemed to be perfectly oblivious to the exposure; not so the cheering, agitated males, three or four of whom hung on to the rear of the taxi and with large eyes contemplated the blood-maddening spectacle. At one corner of the taxi a large flag-shaped placard, supported on a staff, bore the legend: "On to Berlin!"

"Come on, boys, on to Berlin!" shouted the young woman

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in scarlet, working herself up into a state of sensual fury.
"Join up, boys!"

"We will! We will! You bet we will!"

"What will you do to them, boys?"

"We'll cut their gizzards out!"

"Gizzards, nothing!" cried another, uttering an obscenity.

The crowd poured down the Mall, uttering cries, rude witticisms, obscenities; a turgid stream, pressing in excitement like blood in an artery, long asleep and now throbbing with an overwhelming passion, and transcendent as the love of the Bride of Life on the point of consummating her marriage with the Bridegroom Death.

They were within sight of the Admiralty Arch, when the woman in scarlet in a fierce contralto struck up:

"Rule, Britannia! Britannia rule the waves!"

and hundreds of voices at once took it up:

"Britons never, never, never shall be slaves!"

The tune ran in Gombarov's blood, and he sang with the rest.

The *cortège* disbanded in Trafalgar Square, owing to the density of the crowd there. Gombarov turned into Whitehall. Late editions of the evening papers were on sale, announcing Great Britain's declaration of war. He bought and read the headlines:

ARMAGEDDON: SEVEN GREAT NATIONS AT WAR
GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE, RUSSIA, SERBIA AND BELGIUM
AGAINST GERMANY AND AUSTRO-HUNGARY

OTHER NATIONS TO COME IN

BRITISH FLEET READY FOR ACTION

As with the crowd surging round him he read this news, he was seized with both fear and rejoicing. What should he

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fear? Why should he rejoice? No doubt, there were others in the crowd who both feared and rejoiced. Why should they rejoice at a calamity so dreadful and evil? Why should they be glad at the possible fall of walls that Civilisation had taken so long to build up?

His own fears were clear and determinate. They were purely personal fears. His existence had been precarious enough, it would become more precarious, perhaps even impossible. For he was a poor man, bereft of kin and love and money, a castaway in an alien land, which was about to become an armed camp, with as little thought of the friendly stranger as of the enemy. But his rejoicing was abstract, secret, mysterious, with a total disregard of his person or safety. It was the joy, perhaps, that came with the dim, as yet subconscious realisation that here, at all events, was an end to boredom and a beginning to epic events, above all, that strange, curiously cosmic, processes of justice were at work. For, surely, if a great civilisation, which has boasted of having made war impossible, lapses into barbarism, that barbarism must have been there in its heart all the time; and having suspected its being there, he now felt justified in his long held supposition of it all having been a delusion and a mockery! Well, it was something to know that; if there was no pity, at least there was some sort of justice. And in the satisfaction of his discovery, he lost his personal fears.

"After all," he said to himself, "what does life matter? The life that is! What do I matter? When it comes to that, I can join up. It may not be a bad idea at all! If I lose my life, what of it? Only I'd like to see it a clean job. I shouldn't like to be mutilated, lose a leg or an arm or the sight of my eyes!"

But why did these others, these great multitudes, rejoice:

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the shopkeepers, the comfortable job holders, the factory employes, the well-to-do young bloods, above all the women? Were these, who had everything to lose, also exhilarated by some abstract, secret, mysterious, even mystical purpose withheld from their consciousness, but nevertheless deep-rooted as are all original so-called divine impulses in men? If so, there was hope, and life was, indeed, a divine adventure, eternally pendulating between aspirings and burrowings.

Worn out by his strenuous day, he was in bed by half-past one. He did not close his eyes until about six, then only to dream.

Once more Gombarov dreamt the old, ever-recurring corridor dream, which came to him at irregular intervals since childhood, always in a new variation.

It was almost an exact repetition of the dream he had had two years before at Paris. Again, he groped through a labyrinth of dimly lit passages of what seemed to be a tall, tottering, many-roomed house, and on each side of him walked a shadowy being: one a grave, quiet presence, the other fierce and domineering. They walked thus for a long time, then the two presences seemed to merge into one, laughing and weeping by turns. And sounds of laughter and weeping came also from behind the shut doors of innumerable mysterious cells, and Gombarov was also seized with laughter and weeping, and thus, laughing and weeping, he awoke, and real tears ran down his cheeks in the broad daylight.

The church bells were ringing, and a newsboy in the street below was shouting:

“War-r! War-r! The latest extry about the war-r!”

Moved by excitement, he jumped out of bed, washed and dressed, and walked out of doors.

Around the corner a group of pleasant, chubby-faced boys



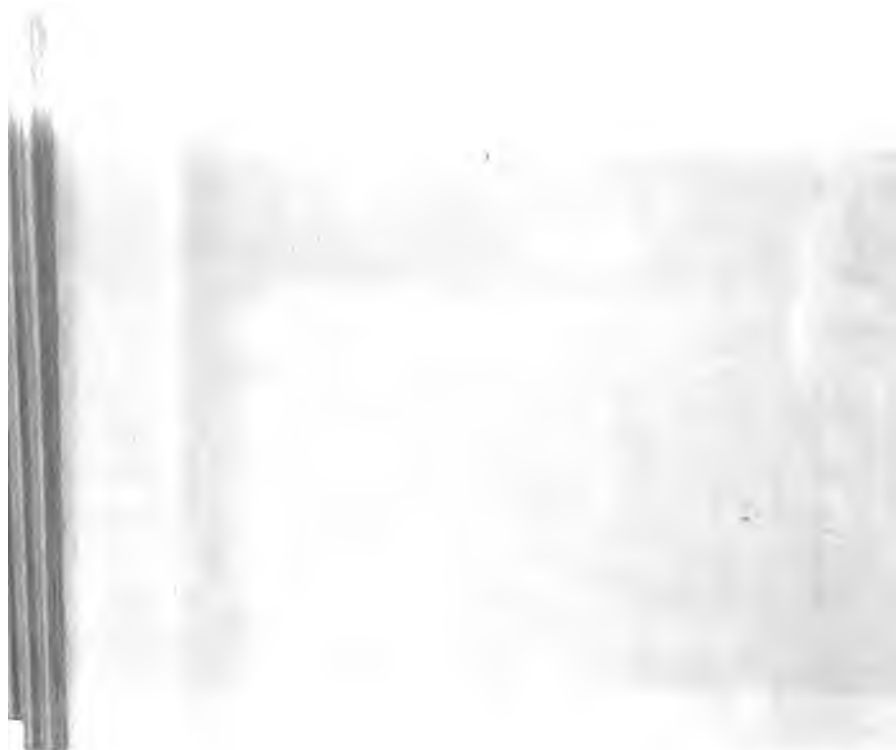
IT HAD TO BE

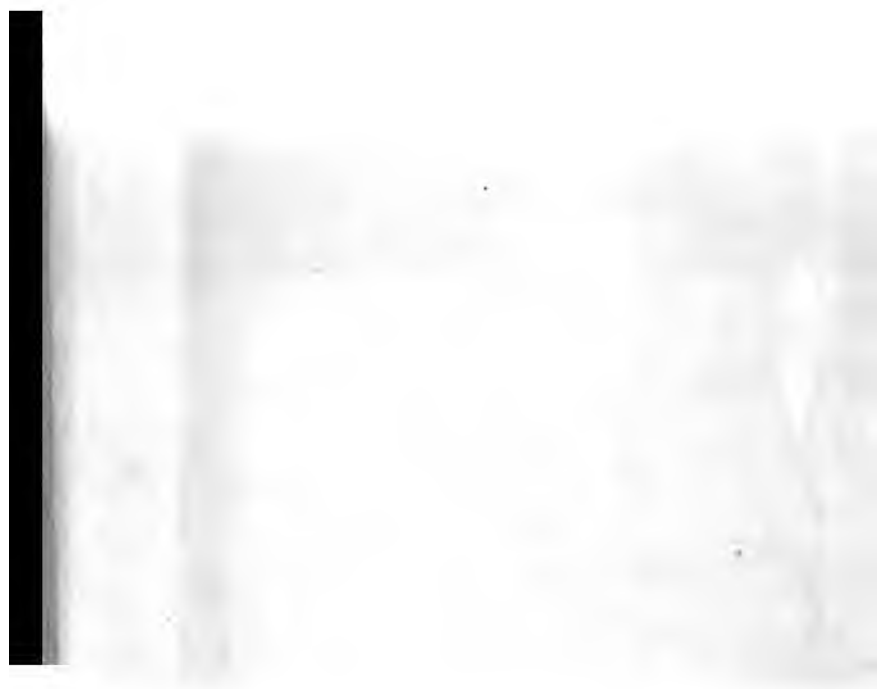
in the uniform of scouts stood beating the drums and blowing the bugles. In the background was a shop, and in the window of the shop a placard, and on the placard the legend:

“Business as usual!”

Thus, it must have been also, when Nineveh fell and Rome fell.

THE END







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